CHINOISERIE by HELEN Mc CLOY

THE saint MAGAZINE

MARCH
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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Chinese Reds Plot Against Us in the Caribbean in

BLACK ALLIES

A New Counter-Espionage Story

by TERENCE ROBERTS

Also

MICHAEL INNES

CORNELL WOOLRICH

LESLIE CHARTERIS

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher. All is vanity.

And, I would add on my own, weird and wonderful are the ways thereof.

It has long been accepted that women would endure anything to be beautiful, or to be thought beautiful according to the standards of their time and place, from the tortured bound-up feet of olden China, to the stretched platter-lined lips of the Ubangi, to the tight-laced whalebone stays of our own European great-grandmothers. But, it is said, they have at last progressed beyond that. Have they? Is the surgical implantation of plastic pads to build up improbable bosoms, or massive injections of silicone for the same purpose, fundamentally much less barbaric?

Men do not generally go in for corsetry, and like to sneer at those who do. But why do they carry this manly cult of naturalness to such a reverse extreme as to feel no shame at the middle-aged onset of a pot belly? Though it may be thought effeminate to wear a girdle, why should it not be widely considered most masculine to take the necessary exercise and observe the necessary restraint at table for a man to keep a flat stomach all his life?

Both sexes, from one cause or another, may suffer the eventual loss of teeth. And when major replacements are indicated, modern dental prosthesis can provide sets of artificial choppers that are both efficient and realistic to look at. But why does practically every customer for them demand a set of such dazzling perfection that, exposed in an aging face, they can only proclaim their falseness at the full volume of their screaming gleam? Why doesn't real vanity dictate that they should be made just a little irregular, just a little less blinding white, so that on a casual encounter anyone might take them for real, and give the wearer undeserved but flattering credit for having kept them so long and so comparatively well? This, after all, is only the same psychology as has resulted in the recent boom in contact lenses.

But the wearing of spectacles is not on the whole regarded as a confession of inferiority, at least among men, if you exclude the very young. Horn-rimmed, they were once the identifying prop of the aggressive stage American; rimless, or bi-focal, they can be impressively worn by professors, pundits, and even politicians, supplying a useful suggestion of long background study and resultant sagacity.

Why, then, are deaf people, as a class, so inordinately sensitive about being hard of hearing? Why do so many of them stubbornly refuse to admit it and wear a hearing aid as normally as a myope wears glasses? Do they just *like* forcing others to shout at them, and looking stupid when the conversation they haven't heard goes over their fat heads?

Cecil Chaplin

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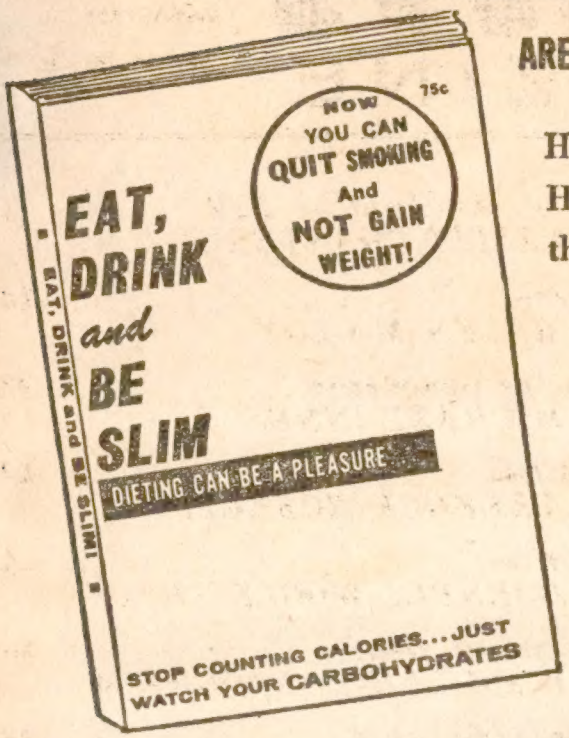

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instead of the saint—xiv

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

It has been said that you can do almost anything with the English language except spell it.

Spelling has never been a personal problem of mine: for some mysterious reason, from the earliest age, it just seemed to come naturally. I have a theory that spelling English is almost a sort of gift, like a musical ear: either you are born with it, or you can never acquire it. I have known the most intelligent and highly educated people, even professional writers, whose spelling would barely have got a passing mark in the third grade, while orthographically faultless letters are often written by others whose age began to outdistance their IQ soon after they qualified to vote.

If it were not for its weird irregularities of spelling and pronunciation, English would be about the easiest language in the world to learn. The verbs hardly change: he eats, we eat, you eat, they eat, with no ridiculous complications like *il mange, nous mangeons, vous mangez, ils mangent.* Males and females are masculine and feminine, but no fictitious and unpredictable genders are assigned to things like vegetables, furniture, and emotions, with a neuter thrown in for good measure, entailing three articles like the German *der, die,* and *das,* each with its own declension for the genitive, accusative, dative and ablative cases. There is hardly a subjunctive detectable by the naked eye or ear. But faced with such anomalies as *tough, though,* and *through,* many a foreigner has been convinced that it is a language which could only have been devised by maniacs and can only be mastered by their ilk.

I have just been reading an article by one William Barkley (which is also the British pronunciation of "Berkeley", that Square where the nightingale sang) in which he revealed that this theory is very close to the truth.

Real olde English, according to him, was just as illogically complex in its grammar as all those other languages you ever had to tackle in school, if not more so. But when William the Conqueror (1066) invaded and took over the country, French became the official language, and English was relegated to the common peasants and laborers. Being simple folk, they spoke a simple patois that wasted no time on highfalutin grammatical frills, and they got along with it just fine.

Then, in 1349, came the Black Death, which carried off half the entire population of the country. But apparently the peasants and laborers, being of more rugged stock, suffered a smaller percentage of casualties than the French-speaking upper classes, who were of course less numerous even to begin with; and the monks, who in those days were the guardians of all learning and literature and who copied any existing books by hand, were practically wiped out. Out of the chaos which ensued, of which we obviously have only the scantiest records, the basic English of the common people seems to have emerged again triumphantly as the national tongue.

But since it had always been a spoken and not a literary language, there were no rules about how to write it, and those who first tried to put it on paper made up their own spelling along their own phonetic lines. William Caxton, the first English printer, in setting the *Morte d'Arthur* in 1485, subtitled it "The Lyfe and Deth of King Arthur", and cheerfully adopted what we should call ultra-modern spellings like *horsbak, heven, frend, wil, shal, gard,* and *sak.* The poet Edmund Spenser, in the late 16th century, was perfectly satisfied with *tung, yung,* and *neibor.* Shakespeare, as we now call him, signed his own name with several different spellings. And, Mr. Barkley tells us, he wrote *"hart-ake* in *Hamlet;* Marlowe and Milton wrote *num* and *lim;* Donne wrote/No man is an *iland;* Milton wrote *sovran."* And he goes on:

> The original Authorized Bible of 1611 spells *beleeve, beleeveth, unbeleef, beleever, unbeleever.* Today's copy, printed by the Oxford University Press, spells *believe, believeth, unbelief, believer, unbeliever.* Now this magnificent press prints another immortal book, the Oxford English Dictionary. Look up *believe* in this dictionary

and you will read "the spelling is erroneous."

So we discover that none of the spelling problems so many people have to wrestle with today existed before the pedants and pedagogues made their belated comeback and got their cotton-picking fingers on what was originally a sensible, simple, do-it-yourself orthography—just as they tried to invent a grammar, based on Latin, to fit a language which never had it, but which provided all kinds of tricky nonsense on which to waste the time of school-children.

An examination of similar facts should take a lot of the wind out of the insular British snobs who sniff superciliously at such "American" spellings as *honor* and *color:* these are exactly the spellings of the original Latin from which the words were adopted, and are certainly the way they were spelt in England before some upstart bore like Dr. Johnson gave his indorsement to a superfluous and illegitimate *u* in the second syllable. And purists on both sides of the Atlantic who profess to be horrified by such "modern" atrocities as *nite* and *thru* should be reminded that such simplified forms would have been considered perfectly acceptable by their proudest ancestors a few hundred years ago, and but for the intervention of a few self-appointed wizards of complication might have been standard today.

The *nu speling* which was the pet bee in the bonnet of George Bernard Shaw, and which he left a sizeable legacy to promote, would actually be only a formalized return to the logical and intelligible principles according to which English was first put on paper.

In the face of such argument, it may well be asked why this Magazine, not to mention the still more prestigious *Sunday Express*, has not taken a bold lead to get our language back to simplicity.

The answer, as far as I am concerned, is that I'm quite certain the printers, publishers, and distributors would never let us do it. They would be convinced of nothing except that we were some kind of nuts. And might even try to have us locked up, for our own good.

As I was wondering what other great thoughts to fill this department with, I picked up a copy of the London *Daily Express,* the workaday sister (or brother?—are newspapers

considered masculine or feminine?) of the Sunday paper I was just quoting from, and was confronted with the headline

WILL PRINCESS ANNE BE A WRITER?

(For the illumination of American and other non-British readers, it may be necessary to explain that the Princess Anne referred to is the 16-year-old daughter of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.)

> *An exceptional literary talent is emerging in the Royal Family. Princess Anne has been given the highest possible grading for English literature in the GCE examination she sat at Benenden School in the summer...*
>
> *Literary talent is nothing new in the Royal Family although none of their works has found its way into the company of the literary giants.*

The article went on to cite the memoirs and monographs of the Duke of Windsor, Queen Victoria's semi-autobiographical *Journal of Our Life in the Highlands,* and the reminiscences of two of her grand-daughters.

The samples I have read myself comprise only the Duke of Windsor's own story, which is obviously interesting, and about half of one volume of *The Letters of Queen Victoria,* which, though bilingually written in good English and French and of great probable value to historians, I found so overpoweringly dull that I could never finish it.

But writing of this sort, telling of historic events and scenes in which they have taken part, is the eventual exercise of most important public figures, and although most of them command correct grammar and syntax (and when they don't, someone corrects it for them before it goes to press) only an infinitesimal few have the true literary gifts of a Winston Churchill.

I cannot think of a single instance of any royal personage, from any country, writing any work of fiction of sufficient quality to attract any attention. And this, I think, is a great pity.

Every "world" known to human experience and endeavor —political, military, theatrical, literary, big business, little business, religious, criminal, and on down to the most stupefyingly humdrum—has been explored not once but hundreds of times by writers who, with great frequency, and lived in those worlds themselves and who can handle their local color with photographic accuracy of Ektachrome. Although their plots may be pure fiction, the situations and characters are inevitably based on or synthesized from fact and composite experience, and their interactions and reac-

tions are true to the milieu in which they revolve, and so give us the pleasure of an authentic insight into facets of life where we could never otherwise peep and eavesdrop. The writer of memoirs can not do so much: inhibited by respect for the living or recently deceased, or by the laws of libel or the dictates of good taste, and very often with a motive of vindicating or glorifying himself, he is barred from the complete revelation which would let us feel that we had really lived a little while in his world with him.

But all the fiction that has yet been laid on the inside of palaces has been nothing but the imaginative concoction of novelists who never penetrated beyond a formal reception, at best, or who picked up a few crumbs of observation in some menial or official service. No king or queen, prince or princess, has yet had the talent or ambition to tell, through fictitious characters and even under a pseudonym, what kings and queens really think and feel and how they talk to each other when they are alone.

Not from any snob interest, but from the earthiest human curiosity, that is a book which I shall always hope to read some day. Whenever it is written, it will be certain of a place on the best-seller list (assuming it is done with even moderate competence) and subsequent movie sale at a price at which even the royalest nose could not turn up, these days. And the gossips' game of trying to identify the author should become one of the most entertaining whodunits of the mystery season.

Since we seem to have been unwontedly devoted to the uses of language and literature this month, we might as well go right through on the same note.

When I was still in college, but more or less consciously training for my eventual trade, I acquired a book called *The Art of Writing*, by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, a minor novelist but most distinguished lecturer at Oxford (which, since I was at Cambridge myself, I had to regard as a most unfortunate aberration). In that collection of lectures, published in 1916, he pilloried the pretentious pervisions of the English language which were then maliciously classified as "journalese" with such grace and wit that I became his devout disciple and for many years would mentally submit

every gaudy phrase or paragraph which I was about to set down to the criterion of his presumable analysis.

As many years went by, I fear that I acquired a number of stylistic pretensions and embellishments of my own which would have brought down and deserved his scornful thunder and lightning. I still feel sometimes embarrassed and humble before his critical ghost, even if unrepentant: I had to do it, because in this more lurid age you get somewhere by being distinctive, not by being dignified and right. During a parallel interregnum, another generation of lively and literate newspaper editors virtually obsoleted "journalese" (in which, believe you me, it regularly *transpired* that some cad had lured a maiden into "a compromising situation" where "intimacy took place", as a result of which she was left "in an interesting condition") only to have it replaced by Washingtonese or Whitehallese, the bureaucratic gobbledegook developed by dedicated seat-warmers to enhance their own semi-literate importance, confuse and entrap the suffering populace, create colossal computerized filing subdivisions, and by all means divert attention from their professionally organized bungling.

But already, before any sharp-eyed critic could pinpoint and isolate it, the jargon which we might have been ready to label "bureaucratese" is ascending into yet loftier realms of what, since nobody else seems to have beaten me to the coinage, I propose to call *drivelgab*. This, for the edification of any bystanding pundits from the Oxford English Dictionary, purports to derive from the obligatory outpourings of professional politicians (*drivel*) and the hypnotic sludge of hollowly resonant verbiage and tinkling symbols (*gab*) in which they practise masking the bumbling paucity of their own fog-bound ideas.

As a scintillating example of this, I do not think I could do better than to quote from a presumably impersonal news report of a speech made last fall by Mr. Harold Wilson, Prime Minister of Great Britain, about the "squeeze" measures enacted last July "as preparing the way for expansion":

> "We propose to use these measures not as a prescription for stagnation but as a springboard...
>
> "At the end of the present economic stringencies, the priorities would be economic investment rather than social programmes...
>
> "There should be no encouragement of consumer expenditure or social programmes as a priority. Increased productivity is the means by which it is expected these

would be paid for. . .

"There is a new attitude to technological advance, but it takes time for this to have its effect both on our capital development and on our resistance to rising imports. . ."

Yes, the language is indisputably orthodox, traditionally spelled, grammatically phrased school-book English. I read it through ten times, in a conscientiously stubborn effort to dig any useful meaning out of a chain of impressively long and authoritative-sounding words magisterially strung together with intent to flatten and smother all argument like a balloon-treaded tank. If any of our much brighter readers can excavate a hard core of clarion meaning which I have missed, I most abjectly and wistfully salute them.

It is perhaps fortunate that this is not an illustrated magazine, except for the few features we have run under the heading of *The Saint in Modern Art*, and an odd cut that sneaks in occasionally for some special purpose, since my artistic talents are best exemplified by the little stick figures which you find scattered here and there more or less as punctuation, and my own appreciation of Art with the capital A is strictly oldfashioned, square, non-with-it, and switched off, preferring that corny sentimental school of pictures in which the grass is green, not purple, cows look exactly like cows, not exploding blueprints, and people are recognizably people, with only two sets of limbs, two eyes in the usual places, and not a cubical breast in a whole mammarium.

Just the other day, it was brought home to me how abysmal devoid I am of any appreciation of true Art, when I was lured into an extremely classy Art Gallery in London to behold some of the works of a Danish phenomenon named Asger Jorn. Introducing a beautifully and expensively printed catalog of the exhibition, some authority named Toni del Renzio, of Milan, whose name happens to be unknown to me but whose verbal virtuosity will be instantly apparent, wrote in part:

> If we can now look at paintings and not be too bothered by having to decide whether they are abstract or figurative, not be too worried by their sometimes extremely strange ways of telling us about the world we

> think we normally see, even welcoming the obscure references we are inclined to find, Asger Jorn has been one of the artists to teach us these new learned responses, to condition the reflexes of the neuro-psycho-intellectual syndrome. His recent works continue to explore the interpenetration of image and abstraction, but operate in a somewhat altered manner. Where once there was a deliberate exploitation of the contradiction, a strident reconciliation in the duration of the painting's life of a continuing conflict, an angry armistice punctuated by nascent violations, an explosive and menacing meeting of opposing means of expression held in hovering interference with each other, now there is a more phased alternation...

Well, that should hold anyone for openers. But Signor del Renzio has a lot more in his hand:

> Of the artists of the Cobra Group in which Jorn played a leading role, he is the one who, from the first, sought to master expressionism, to dominate it, but never to tame it. He journeyed to the wilder shores and has regularly sent us some of the most hallucinatory documents of the Heraclitean flux. In the collision of image and abstraction, the Dionysian and Apollonian ideas of art have also met in a perpetual precarious parity... Juggling a riot of contradictions with the aplomb of a jesuit, the innocence of a marxist, and the wilfulness of a vandal, inventing a maelstrom logic with an algebra never formalised, he is a subtle and subversive dialectician whose argument compresses theses, antitheses, and syntheses into a dense painterliness, refrectory as an anarchist crystal, as coherent as its elements are heterogeneous.

This has got to be one of the cosmic statements of the decade. The innocence of a marxist, however dense a painterliness it might compress syntheses into, still has me in a Heraclitean flux.

But Signor del Renzio did not disappear into a graceful haze of words. He punched home his point concretely:

> The recent canvases have been beautifully stroked with brushes charged with colour, just as beautifully jabbed and blobbed and scratched. Fine eye and hand calculated the nuances of meandering lines before exploding them in an irate graphism, the berserk poetry of an impatient poise. Tumultuously inhabited by all the contradictions that Jorn can call to uneasy collaboration and order in ever-changing hierarchic eminence, never-

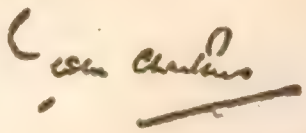
theless the paintings exhibit no signs of eclecticism and possess a stylistic unity that is the more remarkable for its extensive permissiveness.

You are by this time, I know, slavering for some inkling of what these fabulous tableaux looked like. Unhappily, our miserable facilities would not allow us to reproduce them in all their beautifully jabbed, blobbed, and scratched colour. In black and white they would look like nothing. In their original hues, they looked to me, with my most extensive permissiveness, like the result of squeezing tubes of various strong tints at random over the canvas and smearing them about with a chunk of hierarchic eminence and a handful of impatient poise.

Which simply goes to prove how ignorant, stupid, and purblind I am. Toni (as I am beginning familiarly to think of him, after this escorted tour through the higher realms so far beyond my earthbound and sodden apperception) gives his own estimate in one climactic sentence which may yet reverberate down the corridors of the Louvre:

> Like a magpie, Jorn collects pictorial means and regardless of their original purposes uses them to serve the exigence of his communication and immerses them in the total Baphometic baptism of a fiery need.

We forsaken barbarians who somehow never got Baphometically baptized can only, I suppose, pay envious homage to the magpies. But it is humiliating to realize how little, after all, we are capable of understanding the true meaning of Art.



chinoiserie

by Helen McCloy

This is the story of Olga Kyrilovna and how she disappeared in the heart of Old Pekin.

Not Peiping, with its American drugstore on Hatamen Street. Pekin, capital of the Manchu Empire. Didn't you know that I used to be language clerk at the Legation there? Long ago. Long before the Boxer Uprising. Oh, yes, I was young. So young I was in love with Olga Kyrilovna... Will you pour the brandy for me? My hand's grown shaky the last few years....

When the nine great gates of the Tartar City swung to at sunset, we were locked for the night inside a walled, medieval citadel, reached by camel over the Gobi or by boat up the Pei-ho, defended by bow and arrow and a painted representation of cannon. An Arabian Nights' city where the nine gate towers on the

---

It can be said that this was China before the Storms—a world unto itself, indifferent to and contemptuous of the ways of the outside world and certain, then as now, that this land, older than those who ruled it, would in time absorb into herself both rulers and the ruled—as she had done for ten thousand years. It was a harsh world, this world of fantasy and fear—a harsh and cruel world—and nevertheless it was a world which is remembered for its arts and its philosophy, and its beauty, all alien to these days.... *H.S.S.*

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forty-foot walls were just ninety-nine feet high so they would not impede the flight of air spirits. Where palace eunuchs kept harems of their own to "save face." Where musicians were blinded because the use of the eye destroys the subtlety of the ear. Where physicians prescribed powdered jade and tigers' claws for anemia brought on by malnutrition. Where mining operations were dangerous because they opened the veins of the Earth Dragon. Where felons were slowly sliced to death and beggars were found frozen to death in the streets every morning in the winter.

It was into this world of fantasy and fear that Olga Kyrilovna vanished as completely as if she had dissolved into one of the air spirits or ridden away on one of the invisible dragons that our Chinese servants saw in the atmosphere all around us.

It happened the night of a New Year's Eve ball at the Japanese Legation.

When I reached the Russian Legation for dinner, a Cossack of the Escort took me into a room that was once a Tartar General's audience hall. Two dozen candle flames hardly pierced the bleak dusk. The fire in the brick stove barely dulled the cutting edge of a North China winter. I chafed my hands, thinking myself alone. Someone stirred and sighed in the shadows. It was she.

Olga Kyrilovna... How can I make you see her as I saw her that evening? She was pale in her white dress against walls of tarnished gilt and rusted vermilion. Two smooth, shining wings of light brown hair. An oval face, pure in line, delicate in color. And, of course, unspoiled by modern cosmetics. Her eyes were blue. Dreaming eyes. She seemed to live and move in a waking dream, remote from the enforced intimacies of our narrow society. More than one man had tried vainly to wake her from that dream. The piquancy of her situation provoked men like Lucien de l'Orges, the French Chargé.

She was just seventeen, fresh from the convent of Smolny. Volgorughi had been Russian Minister in China for many years. After his last trip to Petersburg, he had brought Olga back to Pekin as his bride, and... Well, he was three times her age.

That evening she spoke first. "Monsieur Charley..."

Even at official meetings the American Minister called me "Charley." Most Europe-

ans assumed it was my last name.

"I'm glad you are here," she went on in French, our only common language. "I was beginning to feel lonely. And afraid."

"Afraid?" I repeated stupidly. "Of what?"

A door opened. Candle flames shied and the startled shadows leaped up the walls. Volgorughi spoke from the doorway, coolly. "Olga, we are having sherry in the study.... "Oh!" His voice warmed. "Monsieur Charley, I didn't see you. Good evening."

I followed Olga's filmy skirts into the study, conscious of Volgorughi's sharp glance as he stood aside to let me pass. He always seemed rather formidable. In spite of his grizzled hair, he had the leanness of a young man and the carriage of a soldier. But he had the weary eyes of an old man. And the dry, shriveled hands, always cold to the touch, even in summer. A young man's imagination shrank from any mental image of those hands caressing Olga....

In the smaller room it was warmer and brighter. Glasses of sherry and vodka had been pushed aside to make space on the table for a painting on silk. Brown, frail, desiccated as a dead leaf, the silk looked hundreds of years old. Yet the ponies painted on its fragile surface in faded pigments were the same lively Mongol ponies we still used for race meetings outside the city walls.

"The Chinese have no understanding of art," drawled Lucien de l'Orges. "Chinese porcelain is beginning to enjoy a certain vogue in Europe, but Chinese painters are impossible. In landscape they show objects on a flat surface, without perspective, as if the artist were looking down on the earth from a balloon. In portraits they draw the human face without shadows or thickness as untutored children do. The Chinese artist hasn't enough skill to imitate nature accurately."

Lucien was baiting Volgorughi. "Pekin temper" was as much a feature of our lives as "Pekin throat." We got on each other's nerves like a storm-stayed house party. An unbalanced party where men outnumbered women six to one.

Volgorughi kept his temper. "The Chinese artist doesn't care to 'imitate' nature. He prefers to suggest or symbolize what he sees."

"But Chinese art is heathen!" This was Sybil Car-

stairs, wife of the English Inspector-General of Maritime Customs. "How can heathen art equal art inspired by Christian morals?"

Her husband's objection was more practical: "You're wastin' money, Volgorughi. Two hundred Shanghai taels for a daub that will never fetch sixpence in any European market!"

Incredible? No. This was before Hirth and Fenollosa made Chinese painting fashionable in the West. Years later I saw a fragment from Volgorughi's collection sold in the famous *Salle Six* of the Hôtel Drouot. While the *commissaire-priseur* was bawling, *"On demande quatre cent mille francs,"* I was seeing Olga again, pale in a white dress against a wall of gilt and vermilion in the light of shivering candle flames...

Volgorughi turned to her just then. "Olga, my dear, you haven't any sherry." He smiled as he held out a glass. The brown wine turned to gold in the candlelight as she lifted it to her lips with an almost childish obedience.

I had not noticed little Kiada, the Japanese Minister, bending over the painting. Now he turned sleepy slant-eyes on Volgorughi and spoke blandly. "This is the work of Han Kan, greatest of horse painters. It must be the finest painting of the T'ang Dynasty now in existence."

"You think so, Count?" Volgorughi was amused. He seemed to be yielding to an irresistible temptation as he went on. "What would you say if I told you I knew of a T'ang painting infinitely finer—a landscape scroll by Wang Wei himself?"

Kiada's eyes lost their sleepy look. He had all his nation's respect for Chinese art, tinctured with jealousy of the older culture. "One hears rumors now and then that these fabulous masterpieces still exist, hidden away in the treasure chests of great Chinese families. But I have never seen an original Wang Wei."

"Who, or what, is Wang Wei?" Sybil sounded petulant.

Kiada lifted his glass of sherry to the light. "Madame, Wang Wei could place scenery extending to ten thousand *li* upon the small surface of a fan. He could paint cats that would keep any house free from mice. When his hour came to Pass Above, he did not die. He merely stepped through a painted doorway in one of his own landscapes and was never seen again. All these things indicate that his brush was

guided by a god."

Volgorughi leaned across the table, looking at Kiada. "What would you say if I told you that I had just added a Wang Wei to my collection?"

Kiada showed even, white teeth. "Nothing but respect for your Excellency's judgment could prevent my insisting that it was a copy by some lesser artist of the Yuän Dynasty—possibly Chao Méng Fu. An original Wang Wei could not be bought for money."

"Indeed?" Volgorughi unlocked a cabinet with a key he carried on his watch chain. He took something out and tossed it on the table like a man throwing down a challenge. It was a cylinder in an embroidered satin cover. Kiada peeled the cover and we saw a scroll on a roller of old milk-jade.

It was a broad ribbon of silk, once white, now ripened with great age to a mellow brown. A foot wide, sixteen feet long, painted lengthwise to show the course of a river. As it unrolled a stream of pure lapis, jade and turquoise hues flowed before my enchanted eyes, almost like a moving picture. Born in a bubbling spring, fed by waterfalls, the river wound its way among groves of tender, green bamboo, parks with dappled deer peeping through slender pine trees, cottages with curly roofs nestling among round hills, verdant meadows, fantastic cliffs, strange wind-distorted trees, rushes, wild geese and at last, a foam-flecked sea.

Kiada's face was a study. He whispered brokenly, "I can hear the wind sing in the rushes. I can hear the wail of the wild geese. Of Wang Wei truly is it written —his pictures were unspoken poems."

"And the color!" cried Volgorughi, ecstasy in his eyes.

Lucien's sly voice murmured in my ear. "A younger man, married to Olga Kyrilovna, would have no time for painting, Chinese or otherwise."

Volgorughi had Kiada by the arm. "This is no copy by Chao Méng Fu! Look at that inscription on the margin. Can you read it?"

Kiada glanced—then stared. There was more than suspicion in the look he turned on Volgorughi. There was fear. "I must beg your Excellency to excuse me. I do not read Chinese."

We were interrupted by a commotion in the compound. A giant Cossack, in full-skirted coat and sheepskin cap, was coming through the gate

carrying astride his shoulders a young man, elegantly slim, in an officer's uniform. The Cossack knelt on the ground. The rider slipped lightly from his unconventional mount. He sauntered past the window and a moment later he was entering the study with a nonchalance just this side of insolence. To my amazement I saw that he carried a whip which he handed with his gloves to the Chinese boy who opened the door.

"Princess, your servant. Excellency, my apologies. I believe I'm late."

Volgorughi returned the greeting with the condescension of a Western Russian for an Eastern Russian—a former officer of *Chevaliers Gardes* for an obscure Colonel of Oussurian Cossacks. Sometimes I wondered why such a bold adventurer as Alexei Andreitch Liakoff had been appointed Russian Military Attaché in Pekin. He was born in Tobolsk, where there is Tartar blood. His oblique eyes, high cheekbones and sallow, hairless skin lent color to his impudent claim of descent from Genghis Khan.

"Are Russian officers in the habit of using their men as saddle horses?" I muttered to Carstairs.

Alexei's quick ear caught the words. "It may become a habit with me." He seemed to relish my discomfiture. "I don't like Mongol ponies. A Cossack is just as sure-footed. And much more docile."

Olga Kyrilovna roused herself to play hostess. "Sherry, Colonel Liakoff? Or vodka?"

"Vodka, if her Excellency pleases." Alexei's voice softened as he spoke to Olga. His eyes dwelt on her face gravely as he took the glass from her hand.

The ghost of mockery touched Volgorughi's lips. He despised vodka as a peasant's drink.

Alexei approached the table to set down his empty glass. For the first time, his glance fell on the painting by Wang Wei. His glass crashed on the marble floor.

"You read Chinese, don't you?" Volgorughi spoke austerely. "Perhaps you can translate this inscription?"

Alexei put both hands wide apart on the table and leaned on them studying the ideographs. "'Wang Wei.' And a date. The same as our A.D. 740."

"And the rest?" insisted Volgorughi.

Alexei looked at him. "Your Excellency really wishes me to read this? Aloud?"

Alexei went on. *"At an odd moment in summer I came across this painting of a river course by Wang Wei. Under its influence I sketched a spray of peach blossom on the margin as an expression of my sympathy for the artist and his profound and mysterious work. The Words of the Emperor. Written in the Lai Ching summerhouse,* 1746."

Kiada had been frightened when he looked at that inscription. Alexei was angry. Why I did not know.

Carstairs broke the silence. "I don't see anything mysterious about a picture of a river!"

"Everything about his picture is—mysterious." Kiada glanced at Volgorughi. "May one inquire how your Excellency obtained this incomparable masterpiece?"

"From a peddler in the Chinese City." Volgorughi's tone forbade further questions. Just then his Number One Boy announced dinner.

There was the usual confusion when we started for the ball at the Japanese Legation. Mongol ponies had to be blind-folded before they would let men in European dress mount and even then they were skittish. For this reason it was the custom for men to walk and for women to drive in hooded Pekin carts. But Sybil Carstairs always defied this convention, exclaiming, "Why should I be bumped black and blue in a springless cart just because I am a woman?" She and her husband were setting out on foot when Olga's little cart clattered into the compound driven by a Chinese groom. Kiada had gone on ahead to welcome his early guests. Volgorughi lifted Olga into the cart. She was quite helpless in a Siberian cloak of blue fox paws and clumsy Mongol socks of white felt over her dancing slippers. Her head drooped against Volgorughi's shoulder drowsily as he put her down in the cart. He drew the fur cloak around her in a gesture that seemed tenderly possessive. She lifted languid eyes.

"Isn't Lady Carstairs driving with me?"

"My dear, you know she never drives in a Pekin cart. You are not afraid?" Volgorughi smiled. "You will be quite safe, Olga Kyrilovna. I promise you that."

Her answering smile wavered. Then the hood hid her face from view as the cart rattled through the gateway.

Volgorughi and Lucien walked close behind Olga's cart. Alexei and I followed more slowly. Our Chinese

lantern boys ran ahead of us in the darkness to light our way like the linkmen of medieval London. Street lamps in Pekin were lighted only once a month—when the General of the Nine Gates made his rounds of inspection.

The lantern light danced down a long, empty lane winding between high, blank walls. A stinging Siberian wind threw splinters of sleet in my face. We hadn't the macadamized roads of the Treaty Ports. The frozen mud was hard and slippery as glass. I tried to keep to a ridge that ran down the middle of the road. My foot slipped and I stumbled down the slope into a foul gutter of sewage frozen solid. The lanterns turned a corner. I was alone with the black night and the icy wind.

I groped my way along the gutter, one hand against the wall. No stars, no moon, no lighted windows, no other pedestrians. My boot met something soft that yielded and squirmed. My voice croaked a question in Mandarin: "Is this the way to the Japanese Legation?" The answer came in singsong Cantonese. I understood only one word: "Alms. . ."

Like heaven itself, I saw a distant flicker of light coming nearer. Like saints standing in the glow of their own halos I recognized Alexei and our lantern boys. "What happened?" Alexei's voice was taut. "I came back as soon as I missed you."

"Nothing. I fell. I was just asking this. . ."

Words died on my lips. Lantern light revealed the blunted lion-face, the eyeless sockets, the obscene, white stumps for hands—"mere corruption, swaddled manwise." A leper. And I had been about to touch him.

Alexei's gaze followed mine to the beggar, hunched against the wall. "She is one of the worst I've ever seen."

"She?"

"I think it's a woman. Or, shall I say, it was a woman?" Alexei laughed harshly. "Shall we go on?"

We rounded the next corner before I recovered my voice. "These beggars aren't all as wretched as they seem, are they?"

"What put that idea into your head, Charley?"

"Something that happened last summer. We were in a market lane of the Chinese City—Sybil Carstairs and Olga Kyrilovna, Lucien and I. A beggar, squatting in the gutter, stared at us as if he had never seen Western men before. He looked like any

other beggar—filthy, naked to the waist, with tattered blue trousers below. But his hands were toying with a little image carved in turquoise matrix. It looked old and valuable."

"He may have stolen it."

"It wasn't as simple as that," I retorted. "A man in silk rode up on a mule leading a white pony with a silver embroidered saddle. He called the beggar 'elder brother' and invited him to mount the pony. Then the two rode off together."

Alexei's black eyes glittered like jet beads in the lantern light. "Was the beggar the older of the two?"

"No. That's the queer part. The beggar was young. The man who called him 'elder brother' was old and dignified.... Some beggars at home have savings accounts. I suppose the same sort of thing could happen here."

Again Alexei laughed harshly. "Hold on to that idea, Charley, if it makes you feel more comfortable."

We came to a gate where lanterns clustered like a cloud of fireflies. A piano tinkled. In the compound, lantern boys were gathering outside the windows of a ballroom, tittering as they watched barbarian demons "jump" to Western music.

Characteristically, the Japanese Legation was the only European house in Pekin. Candle flames and crystal prisms. Wall mirrors and a polished parquet floor. The waltz from *Traviata.* The glitter of diamonds and gold braid. Punch à *la Romaine.*

"Where is Princess Volgorughi?" I asked Sybil Carstairs.

"Didn't she come with you and Colonel Liakoff?"

"No. Her cart followed you. We came afterward."

"Perhaps she's in the supper-room." Sybil whirled off with little Kiada.

Volgorughi was standing in the doorway of the supper-room with Lucien and Carstairs. "She'll be here in a moment," Carstairs was saying.

Alexei spoke over my shoulder. "Charley and I have just arrived. We did not pass her Excellency's cart on the way."

"Perhaps she turned back," said Lucien.

"In that case she would have passed us," returned Alexei. "Who was with her?"

Volgorughi's voice came out in a hoarse whisper. "Her groom and lantern boy. Both Chinese. But Kiada and the Carstairses were just ahead of her; Monsieur de l'Orges and I, just behind her."

"Not all the way," amended Lucien. "We took a wrong turning and got separated from each other in the dark. That was when we lost sight of her."

"My fault." Volgorughi's mouth twisted bitterly. "I was leading the way. And it was I who told her she would be—safe."

Again we breasted the wind to follow lanterns skimming before us like will o' the wisps. Vainly we strained our eyes through glancing lights and broken shadows. We met no one. We saw nothing. Not even a footprint or wheel rut on that frozen ground. Once something moaned in the void beyond the lights. It was only the leper.

At the gate of the Russian Legation, the Cossack guard sprang to attention. Volgorughi rapped out a few words in Russian. I knew enough to understand the man's reply. "The *baryna* has not returned, Excellency. There has been no sign of her or her cart."

Volgorughi was shouting. Voices, footfalls, lights filled the compound. Alexei struck his forehead with his clenched hand. "Fool that I am! The leper!"

He walked so fast I could hardly keep up with him. The lantern boys were running. A Cossack came striding after us. Alexei halted at the top of the ridge. The leper had not moved. He spoke sharply in Mandarin. "Have you seen a cart?" No answer. "When she asked me for alms, she spoke Cantonese," I told him. He repeated his question in Cantonese. Both Volgorughi and Alexei spoke the southern dialects. All the rest of us were content to stammer Mandarin.

Still no answer. The Cossack stepped down into the gutter. His great boot prodded the shapeless thing that lay there. It toppled sidewise.

Alexei moved down the slope. "Lights!" The lanterns shuddered and came nearer. The handle of a knife protruded from the leper's left breast.

Alexei forced himself to drop on one knee beside that obscene corpse. He studied it intently, without touching it.

"Murdered... There are many knives like that in the Chinese City. Anyone might have used it—Chinese or European." He rose, brushing his knee with his gloved hand.

"Why?" I ventured.

"She couldn't see." His voice was judicious. "She must have heard—something."

"But what?"

Alexei's Asiatic face was inscrutable in the light from the paper lanterns.

Police? Extraterritorial law courts? That was Treaty Port stuff. Like pidgin English. We had only a few legation guards. No gunboats. No telegraph. No railway. The flying machine was a crank's daydream. Even cranks hadn't dreamed of a wireless telegraphy.... Dawn came. We were still searching. Olga Kyrilovna, her cart and pony, her groom and lantern boy, had all vanished without a trace as if they had never existed.

As character witnesses, the Chinese were baffling. "The Princess' groom was a Manchu of good character," Volgorughi's Number One Boy told us. "But her lantern boy was a Cantonese with a great crime on his conscience. He caused his mother's death when he was born which the Ancients always considered Unfilial."

At noon some of us met in the smoking-room of the Pekin Club. "It's curious there's been no demand for ransom," I said.

"Bandits? Within the city walls?" Carstairs was skeptical. "Russia has never hesitated to use *agents provocateurs*. They say she's going to build a railway across Siberia. I don't believe it's practical. But you never can tell what those mad Russians will do. She'll need Manchuria. And she'll need a pretext for taking it. Why not the abduction of the Russian Minister's wife?"

Kiada shook his head. "Princess Volgorughi will not be found until 'The River' is restored to its companion pictures, 'The Lake,' 'The Sea' and 'The Cloud.'"

"What do you mean?"

Kiada answered me patiently as an adult explaining the obvious to a backward child. "It is known that Wang Wei painted this series of pictures entitled 'Four Forms of Water.' Volgorughi has only one of them—'The River.' The separation of one painting from others in a series divinely inspired is displeasing to the artist."

"But Wang Wei has been dead more than a thousand years!"

"It is always dangerous to displease those who have Passed Above. An artist as steeped in ancient mysteries as the pious Wang Wei has power over men long after he has become a Guest On High. Wang Wei will shape the course of our lives into any pattern he pleases in order to bring those four paintings to-

gether again. I knew this last night when I first saw 'The River' and—I was afraid."

"I wonder how Volgorughi did get that painting?" mused Carstairs. "I hope he didn't forget the little formality of payment."

"He's not a thief!" I protested.

"No. But he's a collector. All collectors are mad. Especially Russian collectors. It's like gambling or opium."

Lucien smiled unpleasantly. "Art! Ghosts! Politics! Why go so far afield? Olga Kyrilovna was a young bride. And Volgorughi is—old. Such marriages are arranged by families, we all know. Women, as Balzac said, are the dupes of the social system. When they consent to marriage, they have not enough experience to know what they are consenting to. Olga Kyrilovna found herself in a trap. She has escaped, as young wives have escaped from time immemorial, by taking a lover. Now they've run off together. *Sabine a tout donné, sa beauté de colombe, et son amour...*"

"Monsieur de l'Orges."

We all started. Alexei was standing in the doorway. His eyes commanded the room. "What you say is impossible. Do I make myself clear?"

"Of course, Alexei. I—I was only joking." Lucien sounded piteous.

But Alexei had no pity. "A difference of taste in jokes has broken many friendships.... Charley, will you come back to the Russian Legation with me?"

The Tartar General's audience hall had never seemed more shabby. Volgorughi sat staring at the garish wall of red and gilt. He was wearing an overcoat, carrying hat and gloves.

"News, Excellency?" queried Alexei.

Volgorughi shook his head without looking up. "I've been to the *Tsungli Yamên*." He spoke like a somnambulist. "The usual thing. Green tea. Melon seeds. A cold stone pavilion. Mandarins who giggle behind satin sleeves. I asked for an audience with the Emperor himself. It was offered—on the usual terms. I had to refuse—as usual. By the time a gunboat gets to the mouth of the Pei-ho, they may agree to open another seaport to Russian trade by way of reparation, but—I shall never see Olga Kyrilovna again. Sometimes I think our governments keep us here in the hope that something will happen to give them a pretext for sending troops into China...."

We all felt that. The *Tsungli Yamên,* or Foreign Office, calmly assumed that our legations were vassal missions to the Emperor, like those from Tibet. The Emperor would not receive us unless we acknowledged his sovereignty by kow-towing, the forehead to strike the floor audibly nine times. Even if we had wished to go through this interesting performance for the sake of peace and trade, our governments would not let us compromise their sovereignty. But they kept us there, where we had no official standing, where our very existence was doubted. "It may be there are as many countries in the West as England, France, Germany and Russia," one mandarin had informed me. "But the others you mention—Austria, Sweden, Spain and America—they are all lies invented to intimidate the Chinese."

Alexei was not a man to give up easily. "Excellency, I shall find her."

Volgorughi lifted his head. "How?"

Alexei shouted. The study door opened. An old man in workman's dress came in with a young Chinese. I knew the old man as Antoine Billot, one of the Swiss clockmakers who were the only Western tradesmen allowed in Pekin.

"Charley," said Alexei, "tell Antoine about the fingering piece you saw in the hands of a beggar last summer."

"It was turquoise matrix, carved to represent two nude figures embracing. The vein of brown in the stone colored their heads and spotted the back of the smaller figure."

"I have seen such a fingering piece," said Antoine. "In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. It is in that portion of the Chinese City known as the Graveyard of the Wu family, in the Lane of Azure Thunder."

"It is the Beileh Tsai Heng who lives there," put in Antoine's Chinese apprentice. "Often have we repaired his French clocks. Very fine clocks of Limoges enamel sent to the Emperor Kang Hsi by Louis XIV. The Beileh's grandmother was the Discerning Concubine of the Emperor Tao Kwang."

"An old man?" asked Alexei.

"The Beileh has not yet attained the years of serenity. Though the name Heng means 'Steadfast,' he is impetuous as a startled dragon. He memorialized the late Emperor for permission to live in a secluded portion of

the Chinese City so that he could devote his leisure to ingenious arts and pleasures."

I looked at Alexei. "You think the beggar who stared at us was a servant of this Prince?"

"No. Your beggar was the Prince himself. 'Elder Brother' is the correct form for addressing a Manchu prince of the third generation."

"It is the latest fad among our young princes of Pekin," explained the apprentice, "to haunt the highways and taverns dressed as beggars, sharing the sad life of the people for a few hours. They vie with each other to see which can look the most dirty and disreputable. But each one has some little habit of luxury that he cannot give up, even for the sake of disguise. A favorite ring, a precious fan, an antique fingering piece. That is how you can tell them from the real beggars."

Alexei turned to me. "When a taste for the exquisite becomes so refined that it recoils upon itself and turns into its opposite—a taste for the ugly—we call that decadence. Prince Heng is decadent—bored, curious, irresponsible, ever in search of a new sensation." Alexei turned back to the apprentice. "Could the Beileh be tempted with money?"

"Who could offer him anything he does not already possess?" intoned the young Chinese. "His revered father amassed one hundred thousand myriad snow-white taels of silver from unofficial sources during his benevolent reign as Governor of Kwantung. In the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes even the wash bowls and spitting basins are curiously wrought of fine jade and pure gold, for this prince loves everything that is rare and strange."

Alexei hesitated before his next question. "Does the Beileh possess any valuable paintings?"

"His paintings are few but priceless. Four landscape scrolls from the divine brush of the illustrious Wang Wei."

Volgorughi started to his feet. "What's this?"

"You may go, Antoine." Alexei waited until the door had closed. "Isn't it obvious, sir? Your Wang Wei scroll was stolen."

Volgorughi sank back in his chair. "But—I bought it. From a peddler in the Chinese City. I didn't ask his name."

"How could a nameless peddler acquire such a painting from such a prince honestly?" argued Alexei. "Your peddler was a thief or a re-

ceiver. Such paintings have religious as well as artistic value to the Chinese. They are heirlooms, never sold even by private families who need the money. Last night the moment I saw the marginal note written by the Emperor Ch'ien Lung I knew the picture must have been stolen from the Imperial Collection. I was disturbed because I knew that meant trouble for us if it were known you had the painting. That's why I didn't want to read the inscription aloud. It's easy to see what happened. The thief was captured and tortured until he told Heng you had the painting. Heng saw Olga Kyrilovna with Charley and Lucien in the Chinese City last summer. He must have heard then that she was your wife. When he found you had the painting, he ordered her abduction. Now he is holding her as hostage for the return of the painting. All this cannot be coincidence."

Volgorughi buried his face in his hands. "What can we do?"

"With your permission, Excellency, I shall go into the Chinese City tonight and return the painting to Heng. I shall bring back Olga Kyrilovna—if she is still alive."

Volgorughi rose, shoulders bent, chin sunk on his chest. "I shall go with you, Alexei Andreitch."

"Your Excellency forgets that special circumstances make it possible for me to go into the Chinese City after dark when no other European can do so with safety. Alone I have some chance of success. With you to protect, it would be impossible."

"You will need a Cossack escort."

"That would strip the Legation of guards. And it would antagonize Heng. Olga Kyrilovna might be harmed before I could reach her. I prefer to go alone."

Volgorughi sighed. "Report to me as soon as you get back. . . .You are waiting for something?"

"The painting, Excellency."

Volgorughi walked with a shuffling step into the study. He came back with the scroll in its case. "Take it. I never want to see it again."

At the door I looked back. Volgorughi was slumped in his seat, a figure of utter loneliness and despair.

Alexei glanced at me as we crossed the compound. "Something is puzzling you, Charley. What is it?"

"If this Beileh Heng is holding Olga Kyrilovna as a hostage for the painting, he

wants you to know that he has abducted her. He has nothing to conceal. Then why was the leper murdered if not to conceal something?"

Alexei led the way into a room of his own furnished with military severity. "I'm glad Volgorughi didn't think of that question, Charley. It has been troubling me too."

"And the answer?"

"Perhaps I shall find it in the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes. Perhaps it will lead me back to one of the men who dined with us yesterday evening. Except for the Carstairses, we were all separated from each other at one time or another in those dark streets—even you and I. . . ."

Alexei was opening a cedar chest. He took out a magnificent robe of wadded satin in prismatic blues and greens. When he had slipped it on he turned to face me. The Tartar cast of his oblique eyes and sallow skin was more pronounced than I had ever realized. Had I passed him wearing this costume in the Chinese City I should have taken him for a Manchu or a Mongol.

He smiled. "Now will you believe I have the blood of Temudjin Genghis Khan in my veins?"

"You've done this before!"

His smile grew sardonic. "Do you understand why I am the only European who can go into the Chinese City after dark?"

My response was utterly illogical. "Alexei, take me with you tonight!"

He studied my face. "You were fond of Olga Kyrilovna, weren't you?"

"Is there no way?" I begged.

"Only one way. And it's safe. You could wear the overalls of a workman and carry the tools of a clockmaker. And stay close to me, ostensibly your Chinese employer."

"If Antoine Billot will lend me his clothes and tools. . ."

"That can be arranged." Alexei was fitting a jeweled nail shield over his little finger.

"Well? Is there any other objection?"

"Only this." He looked up at me intently. His pale face and black eyes were striking against the kingfisher blues and greens of his satin robe. "We are going to find something ugly at the core of this business, Charley. You are younger than I and—will you forgive me if I say you are rather innocent? Your idea of life in Pekin is a series of dances and dinners, race meetings outside the walls in spring, charades at the Eng-

lish Legation in winter, snipe-shooting at Hai Ten in the fall. Your government doesn't maintain an Intelligence Service here. So you can have no idea of the struggle that goes on under the surface of this pleasant social life. Imperialist ambitions and intrigues, the alliance between politics and trade, even the opium trade—what do you know of all that? Sometimes I think you don't even know much about the amusements men like Lucien find in the Chinese City.... Life is only pleasant on the surface, Charley. And now we're going below the surface. Respectability is as artificial as the clothes we wear. What it hides is as ugly as our naked bodies and animal functions. Whatever happens tonight, I want you to remember this: under every suit of clothes, broadcloth or rags, there is the same sort of animal."

"What are you hinting at?"

"There are various possibilities. You said Heng stared at your party as if he had never seen Western men before. Are you sure he wasn't staring at Olga Kyrilovna as if he had never seen a Western woman before?"

"But our women are physically repulsive to Chinese!"

"In most cases. But the Chinese are not animated types. They are individuals, as we are. Taste is subjective and arbitrary. Individual taste can be eccentric. Isn't it possible that there are among them, as among us, men who have romantic fancies for the exotic? Or sensual fancies for the experimental? I cannot get those words of Antoine's apprentice out out of my mind: *this prince loves everything that is rare and strange....*"

A red sun was dipping behind the Western Hills when we passed out a southern gate of the Tartar City. In a moment all nine gates would swing shut and we would be locked out of our legations until tomorrow's dawn. It was not a pleasant feeling. I had seen the head of a consul rot on a pike in the sun. That was what happened to barbarian demons who went where they were not wanted outside the Treaty Ports.

The Chinese City was a wilderness of twisting lanes, shops, taverns, theatres, teahouses, opium-dens and brothels. Long ago conquering Manchu Tartars had driven conquered Chinese outside the walls of Pekin proper, or the Tartar City, this sprawling suburb where the conquered catered to the corrup-

tion of the conqueror. The Chinese City came to life at nightfall when the Tartar City slept behind its walls. Here and there yellow light shone through blue dusk from a broken gateway. Now and then we caught the chink of porcelain cups or the whine of a *yuehkin* guitar.

Alexei seemed to know every turn of the way. At last I saw why he was Russian Military Attaché at Pekin. Who else would learn so much about China and its people as this bold adventurer who could pass for a Manchu in Chinese robes? When we were snipe-shooting together, he seemed to know the Peichih-li Plain as if he carried a military map of the district in his head. Years afterward, when the Tsar's men took Port Arthur, everyone learned about Russian Intelligence in China. I learned that evening. And I found myself looking at Alexei in his Chinese dress as if he had suddenly become a stranger. What did I know of this man whom I had met so casually at legation parties? Was he ruthless enough to stab a beggar already dying of leprosy? Had he had any reason for doing so?

We turned into a narrower lane—a mere crack between high walls. Alexei whispered, "The Lane of Azure Thunder."

A green-tiled roof above the dun-colored wall proclaimed the dwelling of a prince. Alexei paused before a vermilion gate. He spoke Cantonese to the gate-keeper. I understood only two words—"Wang Wei." There were some moments of waiting. Then the gate creaked open and we were ushered through that drab wall into a wonderland of fantastic parks and lacquered pavilions blooming with all the colors of Sung porcelain.

I was unprepared for the splendor of the audience hall. The old palaces we rented for legations were melancholy places, decaying and abandoned by their owners. But here rose, green and gold rioted against a background of dull ebony panels, tortured by a cunning chisel into grotesquely writhing shapes. There were hangings of salmon satin embroidered with threads of gold and pale green, images of birds and flowers carved in jade and coral and malachite. The slender rafters were painted a poisonously bright jade-green and on them tiny lotus buds were carved and gilded. There was a rich rustle of satin and the Beileh Heng walked slowly into the room.

Could this stately figure be the same rude fellow I had last seen squatting in the gutter, half naked in the rags of a beggar? He moved with the deliberate grace of the grave religious dancers in the Confucian temples. His robe was lustrous purple—the "myrtle-red" prescribed for princes of the third generation by the Board of Rites. It swung below the paler mandarin jacket in sculptured folds, stiff with a sable lining revealed by two slits at either side. Watered in the satin were the Eight Famous Horses of the Emperor Mu Wang galloping over the Waves of Eternity. His cuffs were curved like horseshoes in honor of the cavalry that set the Manchu Tartars on the throne. Had that cavalry ridden west instead of south, Alexei himself might have owed allegiance to this prince. Though one was Chinese and one Russian, both were Tartar.

Heng's boots of purple satin looked Russian. So did his round cap faced with a band of sable. His skin was a dull ivory, not as yellow as the southern Chinese. His cheeks were lean; his glance searching and hungry. He looked like a pure-bred descendant of the "wolf-eyed, lantern-jawed Manchus" of the Chinese chronicles. A conqueror who would take whatever he wanted, but who had learned from the conquered Chinese to want only the precious and fanciful. . .

Something else caught my eye. There was no mistake. This was the beggar. For pale against his purple robe gleamed the fingering piece of turquoise matrix which his thin, neurotic fingers caressed incessantly.

No ceremonial tea was served. We were being received as enemies during a truce. But Alexei bowed profoundly and spoke with all the roundabout extravagance of mandarin politeness.

"An obscure design of Destiny has brought the property of your Highness, a venerable landscape scroll painted by the devout Wang Wei, into the custody of the Russian Minister. Though I appear Chinese in this garb, know that I am Russian and my minister has sent me in all haste and humility to restore this inestimable masterpiece to its rightful owner."

Heng's eyes were fixed on a point above our heads for, Chinese or barbarian, we were inferiors, unworthy of his gaze. His lips scarcely moved. "When you have produced the scroll, I shall know

whether you speak truth or falsehood."

"All your Highness' words are unspotted pearls of perpetual wisdom." Alexei stripped the embroidered case from the jade roller. Like a living thing, the painted silk slipped out of his grasp and unwound itself at the Beileh's feet.

Once again a faery stream of lapis, jade and turquoise hues unrolled before my enchanted eyes. Kiada was right. I could hear the wind sing in the rushes and the wail of the wild geese, faint and far, a vibration trembling on the outer edge of the physical threshold for sound.

The hand that held the fingering piece was suddenly still. Only the Beileh's eyeballs moved, following the course of Wang Wei's river from its bubbling spring to its foam-flecked sea. Under his cultivated stolidity, I saw fear and, more strangely, sorrow.

At last he spoke. "This painting I inherited from my august ancestor, the ever glorious Emperor Ch'ien Lung, who left his words and seal upon the margin. How has it come into your possession?"

Alexei bowed again. "I shall be grateful for an opportunity to answer that question if your Highness will first condescend to explain to my mean intelligence how the scroll came to leave the Palace of Whirring Phoenixes?"

"Outside Barbarian, you are treading on a tiger's tail when you speak with such insolence to an Imperial Clansman. I try to make allowances for you because you come of an inferior race, the Hairy Ones, without manners or music, unversed in the Six Fine Arts and the Five Classics. Know then that it is not your place to ask questions or mine to answer them. You may follow me, at a distance of nine paces, for I have something to show you."

He looked neither to right nor left as he walked soberly through the audience hall, his hands tucked inside his sleeves. At the door he lifted one hand to loosen the clasp of his mandarin jacket, and it slid from his shoulders. Before it had time to touch the ground, an officer of the Coral Button sprang out of the shadows to catch it reverently. The Beileh did not appear conscious of this officer's presence. Yet he had let the jacket fall without an instant's hesitation. He knew that wherever he went at any time there would always be someone ready to catch anything he let fall before it was soiled or damaged.

We followed him into a garden, black and white in the moonlight. We passed a pool spanned by a crescent bridge. Its arc of stone matched the arc of its reflection in the ice-coated water, completing a circle that was half reality, half illusion. We came to another pavilion, its roof curling up at each corner, light filtering through its doorway. Again we heard the shrill plaint of a guitar. We rounded a devil-screen of gold lacquer and the thin sound ended on a high, feline note.

I blinked against a blaze of lights. Like a flight of parti-colored butterflies, a crowd of girls fluttered away from us, tottering on tiny, mutilated feet. One who sat apart from the rest rose with dignity. A Manchu princess, as I saw by her unbound feet and undaunted eyes. Her hair was piled high in the lacquered coils of the Black Cloud Coiffure. She wore hairpins, earrings, bracelets and tall heels of acid-green jade. Her gown of sea-green silk was sewn with silver thread worked in the Pekin stitch to represent the Silver Crested Love Birds of Conjugal Peace. But when she turned her face, I saw the sour lines and sagging pouches of middle age.

Princess Heng's gaze slid over us with subtle contempt and came to rest upon the Beileh with irony. "My pleasure in receiving you is boundless and would find suitable expression in appropriate compliments were the occasion more auspicious. As it is, I pray you will forgive me if I do not linger in the fragrant groves of polite dalliance, but merely inquire why your Highness has seen fit to introduce two male strangers, one a barbarian, into the sanctity of the Inner Chamber?"

Heng answered impassively. "Even the Holy Duke of Yen neglected the forms of courtesy when he was pursued by a tiger."

A glint of malice sparkled in the eyes of the Beilah's Principal Old Woman. "Your Highness finds his present situation equivalent to being pursued by a tiger? To my inadequate understanding that appears the natural consequence of departing from established custom by attempting to introduce a barbarian woman into the Inner Chamber."

Heng sighed. "If the presence of these far-traveled strangers distresses you and my Small Old Women you have permission to retire."

Princess Heng's jade ban-

gles clashed with the chilly ring of ice in a glass as she moved toward the door. The Small Old Women, all girls in their teens, shimmered and rustled after the Manchu princess, who despised them both as concubines and as Chinese.

Heng led us through another door.

"Olga!"

The passion in Alexei's voice was a shock to me. In my presence he had always addressed her as "Excellency" or "Princess." She might have been asleep as she lay there on her blue fox cloak, her eyes closed, her pale face at peace, her slight hands relaxed in the folds of her white tulle skirt. But the touch of her hands was ice and faintly from her parted lips came the sweet sickish odor of opium.

Alexei turned on Heng. "If you had not stolen her, she would not have died!"

"Stolen?" It was the first word that had pierced Heng's reserve. "Imperial Clansmen do not steal women. I saw this far-traveled woman in a market lane of the Chinese City last summer. I coveted her. But I did not steal her. I offered money for her, decently and honorably, in accord with precepts of morality laid down by the Ancients. Money was refused. Months passed. I could not forget the woman with faded eyes. I offered one of my most precious possessions. It was accepted. The painting was her price. But the other did not keep his side of the bargain. For she was dead when I lifted her out of her cart."

The lights were spinning before my eyes. "Alexei, what is this? Volgorughi would not. . ."

Alexei's look stopped me.

"You. . ." Words tumbled from my lips. "There was a lover. And you were he. And Volgorughi found out. And he watched you together and bided his time, nursing his hatred and planning his revenge like a work of art. And finally he punished you both cruelly by selling her to Heng. Volgorughi knew that Olga would drive alone last night. Volgorughi had lived so long in the East that he had absorbed the Eastern idea of women as well as the Eastern taste in painting. The opium must have been in the sherry he gave her. She was already drowsy when he lifted her into the cart. No doubt he had planned to give her only a soporific dose that would facilitate her abduction. But at the last moment he commuted her sentence to

death and let her have the full, lethal dose. He gave her good-bye tenderly because he knew he would never see her again. He promised her she would be safe because death is, in one sense, safety—the negation of pain, fear and struggle. . . .

"There was no peddler who sold him the painting. That was his only lie. He didn't prevent your coming here tonight because he wanted you to know. That was your punishment. And he saw that you could make no use of your knowledge now. Who will believe that Olga Kyrilovna, dead of a Chinese poison in the Chinese City, was killed by her own husband? Some Chinese will be suspected—Heng himself, or his jealous wife, or the men who carry out his orders. No European would take Heng's story seriously unless it were supported by at least one disinterested witness. That was why the leper had to die last night, while Volgorughi was separated from Lucien by a wrong turning that was Volgorughi's fault. The leper must have overheard some word of warning or instruction from Volgorughi to Olga's lantern boy that revealed the whole secret. That word was spoken in Cantonese. Olga's lantern boy was Cantonese. Volgorughi spoke that dialect. The leper knew no other tongue. And Lucien, the only person who walked with Volgorughi, was as ignorant of Cantonese as all the rest of us, save you."

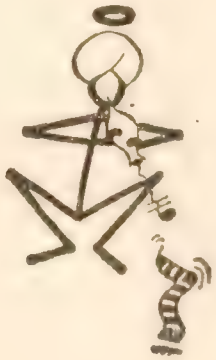
Heng spoke sadly in his own tongue. "The treachery of the Russian Minister in sending this woman to me dead deserves vengeance. But one thing induces me to spare him. He did not act by his own volition. He was a blind tool in the skilful hand of the merciless Wang Wei. Through this woman's death 'The River' has been restored to its companion pictures, 'The Lake,' 'The Sea' and 'The Cloud.' And I, who separated the pictures so impiously, have had my own share of suffering as a punishment. . . ."

. . .Yes, I'll have another brandy. One more glass. Olga? She was buried in the little Russian Orthodox cemetery at Pekin. Volgorughi was recalled. The breath of scandal clung to his name the rest of his life. The Boxer Uprising finally gave the West its pretext for sending troops into China. That purple-satin epicurean, the Beileh Heng, was forced to clean sewers by German troops during the occupation and

committed suicide from mortification. The gay young bloods of Pekin who had amused themselves by playing beggars found themselves beggars in earnest when the looting was over. Railways brought Western businessmen to Pekin and before long it was as modern as Chicago.

Alexei? He became attentive to the wife of the new French Minister, a woman with dyed hair who kept a Pekinese sleeve dog in her bedroom. I discovered the distraction that can be found in study of the early Chinese poets. When I left the service, I lost track of Alexei. During the Russian Revolution, I often wondered if he were still living. Did he join the Reds, as some Cossack officers did? Or was he one of the Whites who settled in Harbin or Port Arthur? He would have been a very old man then, but I think he could have managed. He spoke so many Chinese dialects...

The scroll? Any good reference book will tell you that there are no Wang Wei scrolls in existence today, though there are some admirable copies. One, by Chao Méng Fu, in the British Museum, shows the course of a river. Scholars have described this copy in almost the same words I have used tonight to describe the original. But they are not the same. I went to see the copy. I was disappointed. I could no longer hear the song of the wind in the rushes or the wail of the wild geese. Was the change in the painting? Or in me?



william the conqueror

by Michael Innes

"Judith," Appleby said, "is fond of theatre people. She even continues to be fond of them when they take to films. That is how we came to be at the Bullions' house-party."

"But of course!" Mrs. Crisparkle glowed. "Lady Appleby is so at home in the larger world of art."

"Perhaps the Bullions' was that. Their concern at that time was certainly with art on the large scale. The film people, it seems, have gone back to enormities. Vast crowds and illimitable vistas are the things to plug on the screen if you want to keep television in its place. And the real trump card is a pitched battle, preferably with a great deal of cavalry, and chain-mail, and improbable-looking tents."

"I know those tented fields." Mrs. Crisparkle nodded brightly. "Like a counter covered with lamp-shades in

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This is perhaps a shade late to pay tribute, if obliquely, to that interesting personality who was in a sense the last Viking invader of Britain. Michael Innes is of course the author of THE PAPER THUNDERBOLT, THE SEVEN SUSPECTS, THE CASE OF THE JOURNEYING BOY, etc. **etc.**

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an art-and-crafty shop."

"Quite so. Well, the Bullions were to be starred in a tremendous film called *William the Conqueror*. And one of its high lights, needless to say, was to be the Battle of Hastings."

"Ten-sixty-six." The fine certainty of Mrs. Crisparkle's expression gave way to misgiving. "But were there cavalry at Hastings?"

"I've no idea. But there were no end of archers, and in the film their arrows were going to darken the heavens. That's why archery was all the go at the Bullions during that fatal week-end."

Mrs. Crisparkle was sympathetic. "Those fatal week-ends! My dear Sir John, how well I know them."

But Appleby shook his head. "This," he said gravely, "was a *fatal* week-end. It led to murder.

"I doubt whether Mark Bullion or any of his guests was actually going to draw a long-bow in the film. Most of them must have been booked for nobler roles—dashing about on horseback, chiefly, and encouraging their vassals with heroic cries. Nevertheless, everybody was fooling about with bows and arrows at some improvised butts. And that went for the women too. Claire Bullion, as a matter of fact, was uncommonly good—the best even of the scattering of people with whom archery was a regular sport. She spent most of Saturday instructing a handsome chap called Giles Barcroft. You may recall his name. He had left the London stage for Hollywood about five years before, and now he was back in this country with a considerable reputation. He was to play a big part—one of King Harold's principal nobles, torn between loyalty and his reawakened love for a great Norman lady."

Mrs. Crisparkle nodded intelligently. "The Norman lady being played by Claire Bullion?"

"Precisely. And now I must tell you about the Sunday evening. The Bullions had rather a grand house, which I suppose they had rented—furniture, servants, and all—from some impoverished peer. Half-a-dozen of us were drinking cocktails on a terrace before the west front. Beneath us was a long, narrow sunken garden in what used to be called the Dutch taste, and immediately beyond that was the park—of which, however, we could see no more than a line of rising ground, parallel to our terrace and rather higher, with

two magnificent oaks at either end of it. Beyond, there was simply the sunset sky."

"It sounds rather impressive, Sir John. I get the suggestion of a natural theatre."

"That describes it very well." Appleby glanced at Mrs. Crisparkle with approval. "We might have been an audience looking across the orchestra-pit of that sunken garden and through the great proscenium-arch constituted by those tremendous oaks. What we were viewing was an empty stage, closed by the vast luminous backcloth of the evening sky.

"What was in fact concealed from us by the line of rising ground that formed our immediate horizon, was that part of the park in which the archery mostly went on. I could hear a couple of my fellow-guests rather maliciously discussing what *else* might be going on there at that moment. 'They were fooling round together all yesterday.' 'True enough. But it's my guess they've had a glorious row.' 'So what, my dear fellow? Before Giles went to the Coast they were always having rows, but everybody knew that that was just by the way.' 'I can't make out what Mark thinks about it—can you? Have another of the poor old chap's drinks.'

"All this wasn't exactly obscure—and decidedly it wasn't edifying. The people concerned were talking the more freely because Bullion himself was securely out of hearing—down in the sunken garden in front of us, in fact, playing the lord of the manor and showing off his roses to some enraptured old woman.

"So much for the setting. In another moment, the thing happened.

"Barcroft's head and shoulders appeared silhouetted on that horizon—plumb centre, you might say, of that natural stage. He had the motions of a man scrambling up a bank—and indeed the ground did, as I knew, fall away sharply on the other side. Then he was on the ridge, and suddenly raising an arm. I believe we all supposed that he was going to wave to us. But he was raising *both* arms—flinging them above his head—and at the same moment his knees collapsed under him. With a horrible cry—I can hear it with an effect of terror yet, and I've heard some nasty noises in my time—with a single horrible cry, Giles Barcroft tumbled backwards and disappeared.

"We were all stunned—and the next sound was Bul-

lion's voice calling out hoarsely in the garden. But it wasn't Barcroft's name that rang from him. It was his wife's.

"I believe I jumped pretty smartly from that terrace, and I wasn't much behind Bullion himself in scrambling up that incline and down on the other side. He was kneeling by Barcroft, who lay on his face, rolled over and over in dust. 'Giles,' he was calling out, 'Giles—my God, what's happened?' And then he started back—as well he might. Barcroft was transfixed by an arrow, dead between the shoulder-blades. The feathered shaft had a glint of sunlight on it, and was quivering as if from some last pulsation of the body of the dying man."

Mrs. Crisparkle drew a long breath. "That glint of sunlight. It's all terribly good theatre still."

Appleby nodded soberly. "Certainly a veritable *coup de théâtre* succeeded at once. Claire Bullion appeared in the background—horrified, scared, and carrying a bow. Her husband took one look, jumped to his feet, and in a high, cracked voice denounced her as a murderous fiend. But that wasn't all. In the silence that followed, Giles Barcroft spoke. It was no more than two whispered words, but they were perfectly clear. 'I. . .win, 'he enunciated. Within five seconds he was dead."

"How very bewildering." Mrs. Crisparkle was round-eyed. "Sir John—whatever did you do?"

Appleby smiled grimly. "I grabbed Bullion.

"It had indeed been a natural theatre, and we had been decidedly invited to watch a play. What Barcroft had won was, of course, a bet—a bet that, returning from his archery, he would put over that death-agony convincingly and hold the illusion until the entire house-party was weeping round the supposed corpse—that sort of thing. And Bullion had carefully planted himself down there in the garden, thereby giving himself a start that would take him over that bank seconds before anyone else—a sufficient number of seconds to drive that waiting arrow straight to the heart of his play-acting friend. It was a pretty plan for disposing of his wife's lover—and his wife, as you will have seen, was to have come in for a spot of trouble too."

"I see—I see!" Mrs. Crisparkle's eyes were now saucers. "But how did you *know?*"

"Barcroft had done his turn whole-heartedly—rolling, as I haye told you, over and over in the dust. But the arrow that was supposed to have occasioned this, was sticking straight out of the body, with its very feathering unruffled. It was a bad slip on Mark Bullion's part. May I get you a drink?"

And Mrs. Crisparkle nodded. "Yes," she said rather faintly. "I think you may."

BUREAU OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS

A recent story in *The Sunday Telegraph* of London, for October 30, 1966, describes—quoting from "top secret" documents from the files of Dr. Nkrumah, soon to be published in Accra—some of the activities of his Bureau of African Affairs, which had been increasingly concerned with underground and subversive activities in countries in Africa whose governments did not share Dr. Nkrumah's belief in his own destiny. We are told that agents of the Bureau, trained by Russian and Chinese instructors, often represented themselves to be American (ie., C.I.A.) or British Intelligence agents in the countries to which they were assigned. The Bureau's activities are said to have cost Ghanaian taxpayers roughly a million and a half dollars, above and beyond the subsidies allegedly received from both Russia and China.

One of the documents apparently provides a detailed directive for the personal and political seduction of a twenty-five year old secretary working in an African Embassy in Nigeria. The young lady, who it seems was "not very beautiful", had "never enjoyed the love of men, and though she is anxious to get a husband she does not even get a boy-friend to live with."

What to do? An officer "or informant" of the Bureau must be assigned to the problem. "Such an informant", to quote the story in the *Sunday Telegraph*, "must not be too handsome, must be within the age-hood of the woman, must have certain good qualities which will attract the woman and make her feel that the love being proposed is real and lasting, leading to marriage which will be a permanent one."

"When such a woman is won by the officer or the informant recruiter, she is gradually made to understand that it is necessary to lead good and happy life and therefore will it not be necessary if she brings some of the secrets in her office to someone who is willing to offer fat sum of money for such secrets."

Warning.... The officer must not fall in love with the woman.....

black allies

by Terence Roberts

It began in the middle of a "Norther." This is by far the most depressing event in Caribbean life. One has the "Trades" almost all year, and a somewhat invigorating fall season called locally "The Hurácan Season," which it is, from time to time and place to place. Then, the winds roar and the seawater rises, and people run about, and mashed pelicans are blown inland and lodge on house fronts like tridimensional Dali canvases. But all that passes away. Northers don't. They start blowing a bit and they keep at it, sometimes for a week. The thermometer drops; and the upper-fifties down south feel like the minus-tens up north. The sky is covered by a gray scud, the birds howl and go away, the sea goes muddy, people get wet and petulant, food rots, and small boats at anchor go everlastingly up and down. It's miserable.

There's an old saying that "politics makes strange bed-fellows". In peacetime this makes for amusing moments as yesterday's foes, with often justified faith in our shortness of memory, embrace each other, vowing eternal friendship. And this was true during what had suddenly become a "People's War", as we see in Terence Roberts' latest story about the counter-espionage outfit—sorry, the "communications" centre—in the Caribbean. . . .

On our little "island fortress"—an euphemism I love to conjure and perpetuate—all storm-windows were closed and in our HQ I had Linkya, our pretty but prissy Surinamer factotum, light oil stoves. This horrified her on both pure health and general hygenic grounds, but those of us privileged to huddle in the main room at least sweated warm instead of icy. Suddenly about 4:30 pm on a third norther day, frightful beeping noises came out of Jimmy Lee's cubby-hole.

Jimmy Lee was our communications officer and an early radio bug. He was indispensible to us—and our enemies, also, as a matter of fact—who at that time happened to be mostly Germans. From his radio signals we got and imparted intelligence; and from them also our enemies got theirs. I never have been quite sure who gained the advantage. We were situated on a small, isolated, unclaimed island in the Caribbean, which was set up as what was also euphemistically called a "Communications Center." I had the misfortune to be "in command."

The beeps sent Jimmy scuttling for his gadgets. He closed the door behind him, and I bawled for Linkya.

"Please to make with the Rum mit der limon, mit der bees-stuff. . . for everybody," I commanded. The person bobbed, as is the Dutch custom, and retreated. We sat in gloomy silence. The drinks came and we made the appropriate noises. Then we all lapsed into a dull silence again. If you have not lived in the Caribbean, you cannot have any idea just how dreary a norther is. It rains a bit and it blows a bit; but not much. It's just awful.

Then suddenly Jimmy's door burst open and that normally most placid Oriental—he was a Yunnanese Chinese born in Singapore—sailed into the room waving a long ticker-type sheet of paper.

"These bastards I don't like," he announced to nobody in particular.

This was not like Jimmy. I sat up.

"Jimmy," I said in conversational and social tones, "what's the matter?" The result was to loose a positive tirade from our tame Oriental. And some of the things he said prompted me to arise and edge gently towards my inner sanctum.

Our crew aboard the cay at that time was about 200-strong. Half were indigenous inhabitants; lovely golden people with clean bodies,

good manners, and mixed ancestry. Sixty more were perfectly splendid Jamaican recruits organized into a "Defense Force" under the eagle eye of a professional Sergeant of Police of the island, named Abercrombie—a man of the old school, deeply religious, deeply patriotic, and utterly reliable even in events he neither understood nor actually believed in. The remainder were an appallingly assorted bunch. After Jimmy Lee, my No. 2, came a "Free Hollander," an ex-shoe-salesman from Mexico; a delightful young British medical student, a recognized Hebrew Scholar but of French nationality; an engineer from Panama, Hindu by religion but bearing a Nicaraguan passport; a Brazilian from, of all places, Iceland, due to having married an Icelandic girl who had died in childbirth; a glorious Cockney who was a 'regular' in a British regiment; and a household staff that ranged from a perpetually narcotized, illiterate Honduran Amerind whom we all adored, via the prissy Linkya from Dutch Guiana, to a skinny fellow who professed to be a Kanaka from Samoa—and whom we continued to believe actually *was* a South Pacific Islander. We also, at that time, had a Lithuanian refugee in our midst. I didn't like him; nor he me. I never did discover just why he was foisted on us, but he was supposed to be a "freedom fighter" or some such, and frightfully good at office work. I kept a separate file on him.

You see, in those day we had certain problems that had not then been solved or even resolved. Europe was in a state of flux, and had been, ever since Hitler grabbed Germany. Many western nations, and notably Britain, "played host," as the saying goes, to all the sundry seeking asylum. But not all of this tide were fleeing the Nazis, nor were some of them even refugees. They were 'plants,' and of two principal kinds: fine people forced into the cloak-and-dagger business by the swine who held their families as hostages, and professional agents trained for years to emulate these pathetic, ravaged refugees fleeing from the horror. Further, not all of the latter were from the fascist side of the fence. Oh dear me, no! The Rooskies had been training theirs too; and doing a much more thorough job of it; but, as they so often did in the earlier days, they often goofed in one respect.

The caliber of those they sent out was much higher than the German louts, and they had a tendency to be almost boastful of their superiority. The Russians used citizens of the then Baltic states very often, so that an Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian always presented a three- or four-sided problem. Then, there was another factor involved.

When the war got going in Europe, our boys-in-charge made a practice of shipping anybody of whom they had serious doubts (but no proof of anything, one way or another) to the farthest location possible, where he or she was virtually under "protective arrest," could be kept an eye on, and do the minimum damage, if really naughty. We got several of them; and I must say the boys at home were pretty shrewd. So I was very wary.

And it was the presence of this fellow—one Ainno Leptemkius—that prompted me to shut Jimmy up, and haul him into my retreat; because some of the things he was blurting startled me not a little.

Most people have forgotten W.W. II now. From this somewhat late historical perspective it is often overlooked that the so-called "Allies" were really fighting a three-sided war. There was the usual mess to contend with; there were the Nazi-Fascist-Togo-Jap bloc, who were doing the shooting; and there was the ideological contest, which means the militant activators and interpreters of the Communist Line. May I make it clear that life always goes on, and that people—mistaken, misguided, misinformed, or enlightened—all tend to urge the same ultimate objectives. Whatever the Gautama Buddha, Christ the Essene, and Mohammed the virile, advocated does not seem to be much different from that initially put forward by the expounders of Ancient Hebrew Torah, the Talmudists, Byzantine and later Rennaisance Christianity, and Messrs. Marx, Engels, and Lenin. It's the 'doing' of it that causes all the trouble. This recurrent assininity, called war, gets the whole thing mixed up and brings about the most appalling atrocities. Why people can't just shut up or get drunk, I have never been able to understand; but I suppose that is the way the world swings. However, the Communists were a bloody nuisance.

In their militant expression, they were far more dan-

gerous than the "Narrsee-boys" (as Churchill called them), simply because they were logical. If you *have* to have a war, I cannot see why one should not fight it. All this hang-over from European chivalry and frivolity is pure bunk. The damned business is not some kind of game to be played by indeterminate rules. It's deadly serious. This the commies dig. They always did, and they always will, I fancy. They adopted this attitude in WW. I; and they carried it through WW. II. Their 'house' had been invaded by the Nazi-boys and they were out to both defend theirs and sock their invaders. At the same time they were not over-looking the longer-range objective of socking us. In fact, all three parties—the so-called West, the Naziboys, and the Commies, were all doing everything they could to get each to clobber the other, and hoping to stay intact enough to pick up the pieces left over. In that crazy war, every person was playing footsie with every other person, and it filtered down to the littlest bums like us. As a result, one had to keep a sharper eye on one's allies then on one's enemies. This was the night that this fact came home to Jimmy Lee.

Once I got him in my inner office, I pushed him into a cane chair and asked him to elucidate.

"So what's the trouble?" I began.

Jimmy launched into a long political tirade. I've just been over the substance of this above and so will not reiterate. Point was, Jimmy was a highly intelligent and educated man, and some purely pragmatic facts had suddenly forced him to take a new look at reality. What he had seen, he did not relish. Although he had never been to China, he was Chinese, and he was worried. What had happened was this.

In talking to his Yunnanese pals over his (almost) ham radio he had discovered that there was a 'leak.' The significance of this I must explain.

During WW. II there were no 'loyaler' allies of the West than the overseas and expatriate Chinese. Almost every community in the world has a Chinese nucleus, pocket, or sub-community, carrying on its own life—mostly business—in a dignified and extremely efficient manner; policing itself and its sons and daughters; but keeping in touch with all other Chinese communities. Once it was the Tongs that maintained disci-

pline; but they, with their hatchet-men, got out of hand, so the Chinese businessmen founded banks and things, and carried on. Due not only to Jimmy Lee, I had for some years relied upon these Chinese communities throughout Central and South America not only for decent food, but for help in my official endeavors to promote decency and generally "save the world"! They were terrific. Never once did they let me down in transferring a message from here to there—provided they gave me verbal assurance that they would. It saved an enormous amount of labor since all they had to do was talk to each other in whatever dialect they were born to, or write cryptic instructions on the labels of packages of dried soybean noodles or died squid, and the info sailed thru customs barriers like dry ice. Instead of having to encode a message and somebody else decode it, all I had to do was ask Jimmy to get on what we called "the blower" and tell his pals what I wanted told. Nobody —and not even most other Chinese—could understand one single word of what he was saying; and, if they did, it was too late. Thus, I relied utterly on Jimmy and this bold-faced, open communication system. Now it had let us down.

I asked Jimmy what kind of "leak"; but added something to the effect that: "But you're not suggesting that the Bosch haven't been monitoring all our communications—including the phoney ones—are you?"

Jimmy looked very grim.

"No, Tar (my nickname)," he said; and he used that name only when he was deadly serious, "I am *not*. What I *do* mean is that I have been "planting" a few items for some time, just as a check to see that what I *do* put out *is* picked up by just whom we want. Of course I never for a moment suspected that anybody might cut in on my own stuff but. . ." and he fell silent and brooded.

"What do you mean, Jimmy?" I asked.

"This is a real nightmare," he said in even tones. "Tar, I have to report that some of my own private communications have been turned over to our real problem children, and some of my friends have picked them up. What I mean is, some of my info which was *not* for our ears nor that of the Bosch, but strictly for my friends, *has cropped up in Russian sources! I* know it's my stuff, because it is so detailed. Also, some

of it was pure lies in the first place. . .just testing, you know."

And that *did* make me sit up.

When you broadcast a fact, anybody may pick it up, since facts are facts; but when you disseminate a deliberate falsehood and *it* comes back to you, you know you have a real leak. So there was a long pause.

Finally, I said, "Dear, dear, dear," or some such assininity. "So where do we go from here?"

"Nicaragua, I think," Jimmy replied.

"Oh!" I came back. "Why?"

"Because I'm pretty certain that the trouble is at that Chinese-owned gold mine up the Wanks River. They've been in business there for years and I have a couple of pals there who helped me set up our little talk-system, but an awful lot of ships have been plugged here-abouts recently, and lots of them have had Chinese crews, and. . . ."

"Wait a minute," I interjected. "You mean all those life-rafts riddled with bullet-holes, and with bits of human liver and parts of poor Chinese chaps on them that we towed in last month?"

"Exactly," Jimmy replied. "Tar, you've got to understand something. There's a new breed of people growing up in my father's country. They're not Chinese—*damn them*—it's the same old trouble. . . .the bloody Manchus and all those other barbarians we built the Wall to try and keep out centuries ago. They've gone over to the Commie way of doing things. They're fighting the Japs but they're also after us Chinese and, so help me, if they ever get control of our country, you boys had better look out. We Chinese think in centuries. Tar, you've got a lot to take care of here."

That was the first time I had ever really run into that one. My God! a recrudescence of the Manchu overlordship of great China under *communist* philosophy! I remember literally shuddering. You see, Russia was not yet in the war (on our side) and Mao was still small potatoes, but still "The Faithful,"—as we used jokingly to call them; *i. e.*, the real dedicated Marxists—were still thinking globally and in terms of World Wars III, IV, and so on. The Chinese as a whole at that time were, as I have said, almost violently on our side, and not only when it came to slamming the hated Japs. So now comes the tentacle of the

hydra in Central America, screwing up the works for everybody on general principles as usual. As a matter of fact, the very idea of a "disloyal" Chinese appalled me almost as much as it did Jimmy. That it might be one of his own home-state boys, from Yunnan, who could listen in to his communications —perhaps even one of his own pals, who had been bitten by the communist bug— was, to us, quite terrifying, and both from an immediately practical point of view and the general vista of world history to come. My God, how right we were!

"Jimmy, me boy," I said, "We can't change the world, but we might as well try and throw the biggest spanner into the works we can. *Now*. We've also got to clear our own little channels. What do you advise?"

"Question," he came back, "Can both of us leave this place together?" I pondered that one.

"I'd have to report it in advance. And who do we leave in charge?"

"No! you must *NOT* report it in advance.... It's too late for that.... We've got to catch'em off their hook."

"I get you. But...." Then a thought struck me.

RAIES.

"OK, Jimmy," I said, "I think I can trust that Dutchman, and I'll simply tell him that if anything happens to me and then you, he's in charge. If he mucks it up, our Cockney pal will take over, mark my words; but he does not have to be told. Along the line Sergeant Abercrombie is not likely to let things get out of hand. So let's do a bit of planning."

It was decided that I put out a clandestine call for Raies the Carib, via what or whoever Caribs might be aboard our island at the time. These fabulous sea-gypsies, of pure West African origin but speaking the language of the Carib Amerinds, slip about eastern Central America at will. They take the dimmest view of all non-Caribs, and particularly pale-faces. They have their own laws, morals, and ethics; and these are *not* ours. I had a sort of working agreement with one of them; an enormous, animated, ebony statue for whom I had been lucky enough to do some practical favors—including the smuggling of dope (which the Caribs themselves don't bother to use), saving his sister's life, and generally shielding him from official interference. He had a habit of popping up when most needed;

but I don't know why. I'd never 'called' for him before. Consequently my gyrations were rather funny.

I decided to take a stroll in the Norther that evening, and so announced my intention to the gloomy and sodden community in the HQ central lounge. Luckily I had contrived a reputation for almost ultimate nuttiness, so nobody seemed to pay much attention. However, I missed something, and for this I shall be forever censored. I did not take sufficient account of our new Lithuanian pal.

Launched into the cold rain, clad in an amorphous, allegedly water-repellent garment issued to us from the U.S.A., and, armed with a flashlight and an automatic, I hobbled off over the wet sand in the general direction of the settlement of our local indigenous fisherfolk.

There were a few dim kerosene-lamp flickers from some of the houses that were raised on stilts. I meandered; doing a bit of listening; but, all seemed as normal. Suddenly, I saw Sergeant Abercrombie poking about behind me. He was black on black, but the damned fellow had not only a sixth but about ten more police-senses, and *knew* somebody unauthorized was ahead. *Security!* My God!

So I backtracked as quietly as possible, and gave him the signal as *sotto voce* as possible. The dear man came to an immediate and thundering salute in the darkness. He quivered. I moved up on him.

"Sergeant," I whispered, "I've got a bit of a problem here. I want to latch on to any Caribs there may be aboard. . . .*NO*. . . . *Don't*. . . ." I almost sang out, as I had seen his saluting arm slowly rising. "And don't whisper either," I added. "It carries farther than a command. Just listen to me." He did.

"First, if you know of any Caribs aboard, go find them quietly, and tell any of them that the Boss wants to see Raies very badly and at once. If you don't know of any, ask around. You might get a couple of bottles of rum from Linkya and go call on the locals, with my compliments on this awful cold night. I'll just poke around; so leave me alone." We parted company.

About ten minutes later I was down on the beach under the coconut palms straining my eyes in the inky murk to see if there were any new canoes hauled up. I heard a slight movement and retreat-

ed. And at that moment somebody way off to the right near the 'village' turned on a light and, silhouetted dead center, was one of *those* figures. I'd know a pair of shoulders like that anywhere. Then the light went out.

"Kum dwy' edda," I said in matter of fact tones.

"You no speak English?" a feminine voice came back out of the pitch blackness.

"Yes," I replied. "Can you get Raies here real fast?" I asked.

"You Tar?"

"Yes."

"You do something for me?"

"Yes."

"Please give boat back."

"What boat?"

"Boat you damn whiteman take tonight."

This brought me up sharp, as I had not been told of any boat being impounded. So I said simply, "Yes." The voice dried up.

Then a lot happened which is not interesting though pertinent, but it transpired that a large two-masted Carib canoe had been spotted slipping in thru the upper reef and had been impounded by our Cockney, who was supervising that end of security but who had not returned to report before I left HQ on my Carib hunt. I got the boat discreetly moved along to the appointed place, and Jimmy and I went and sat by it in the driving rain. I shooed everybody else off home under strict orders for secrecy. We waited about an hour, and then I felt a slight shove —it was a *pitch* black night —and smelt something (deliciously) human. Simultaneously my placid and imperturbable Oriental friend let out with a real jump-noise. He too had been grabbed by a vice-like hand and pushed into the canoe, which was immediately propelled down the beach and into the choppy "white-water" of the lagoon. And off he went.

I'll never forget that night nor the dawn, when it eventually came—a horrid blue-gray, laced with tiny rain drops driven almost horizontally. You could not define the junction of sea and air. I was shivering and bailing, as instructed.

It had transpired that our 'bottom' was in command of none less than Raies' sister—my "bloody-sister," as I had guinea-pigged for a transfusion for her some time back. She had agreed to take us to her brother in return for getting her boat back. I told her where I wanted to go, but she clammed up and insisted on fulfilling only *her*

part of the bargain. So where did we end up two days later? On the Viverros Cays!

Had I known then just what part those mysterious islands were going to play in my life later, I would have shuddered then as I do now every time I even think of them. The main cay is actually a real island with trees and two fresh water ponds in it. It has a steep shore composed of huge craggy bits of coral-rock. We sailed all around it, but there was not a sign of life—to our eyes. Then we charged the shore and came to a jarring stop. My blood-sister leaped ashore, wearing only her bare feet, onto the jagged rocks, skittered up the "cliff," and hauled a rope. The rest of us disembarked gingerly. The sails were wrapped up in the unstepped masts and laid in the canoe; then about a dozen other Caribs appeared out of the trees ashore, and we all started heaving. Finally Raies appeared and turned the trick. The huge canoe came scraping and grinding up over the coral and onto the grass of the little plateau. Jimmy and I were "Not Observed" by Raies.

I will skip over the next segment of my chronology, and come to our arrival on the opposite mainland about fifty miles up the Wanks River, which divides the Republics of Honduras and Nicaragua. It was a beautiful, clear-sky evening, and the river ran through towering stately forest. The norther had gone. Only one thing destroyed my bliss. My blood-sister had not been permitted passage. I'm pretty sure now that I was 'in love' with that statue. Raies was completely uncommunicative. We slid ashore and prepared a really excellent meal over a small fire. Then we went to sleep.

About midnight Raies woke me and beckoned in the brilliant moonlight to follow him to the beached canoe. We climbed aboard and lit up cigarettes. He said nothing.

"My good friend," I finally remarked, "you know what Jimmy Lee wants. But how do you suggest he goes about it?" Raies grunted and pondered.

"My brother (I had not known of this chap before) take him to the factory (the gold mine) troo de bush. You stay here, you make too much noise! I go follow. When he get mon, he tell what to do. OK?"

"Oh, so he wants to get the man?" I asked.

"He say one of he man there he want fix. You ask help. . . .*I* fix."

Then it happened.

A blinding searchlight suddenly came on, catching us full in its beam; and at the same moment a burp gun roared. Instinctively we ducked, as chips flew off the gunwhale of the canoe. Raies grabbed me. All he yelled was, "Over—Mon"; and somehow he used me to help him tip that canoe over sidewise so that we spilled into the dark water. Bullets kept on coming, some richochetting off the keel of the canoe, but we went under, reached for the bank, and slithered up under the trees to the right. The huge light drifted in towards us. Then there came one staccato ping, and it went out in a shattering of glass. Immediately a flashlight came on from on shore. Of course, it was Jimmy; and Jimmy really let them have it.

Not content with unloading two automatics, he tossed (with deadly accuracy) a little device we had invented, right bang smack into the approaching launch. (I can guarantee that we were the *original* inventors of the Molotov Cocktail.) This thing literally "set fire" to a lot of the *men* in the launch. A couple managed to drop overboard and start swimming, but two of the Caribs roared up to them like sharks out of the night, grabbed them, and towed them ashore. Both were local Amerinds. The rest we polished off at leisure. Then we towed the boat inshore.

Raies appeared in the flickering beams of the flashlights.

"Mr. Lee," he barked, "If you want go factory, come now. Only little way and they hear noise. Come. . . ."

Jimmy got the clue, and, pausing only to grab some ammo, he ran blindly off after Raies into the dark forest.

I have a gammy leg so I did not try to follow, even without Raies' overt observation about my clumsiness in the bush; but I got to thinking. Things had happened rather fast but one thing was obvious. We had been spotted; and we had better "cover up." So I ordered the launch, which was on fire, doused and pushed out into the stream, real quick. Also I had the canoe righted and all equipment retrieved and accounted for. Then we loaded her and poled *upstream* a couple of hundred yards; tied her ashore under some overhanging bushes, and crept up onto the low levee, in silence. We waited.

An hour went by, during

which only one interesting thing happened. A much larger launch came down the river sweeping *two* giant spots back and forth along both shores. We had our canoe well in under a dense tangle of a sort of wild rose bush, and the light-operators missed us. But they did hit where we *had* been before, and went jabbering ashore. I had all I could do to keep my gang quiet. Then the launch started up her main engines and roared off downstream. Silence finally descended upon us again. Then Raies appeared.

"Come quick," he whispered. "Your friend Mr. Lee very bad."

I will not forget that moment either. That pal Jimmy had got it, made me so mad I almost lost control. I was terribly fond of the idiot, and a great admirer of his, and I was smarting under the 'insult' of not being permitted to be on the safari. After all, I *was* the 'Boss,' and I considered myself indispensible—dumb-kopf!

I got into action, but fast. Actually, I am not a bad bush-whacker, and I really had more experience than Raies, the seaman, in this respect. We got thru the tangle very fast and hit a great blaze of lights. It was the Chinese gold mine, and there were people running about everywhere—but in complete silence. It was uncanny. Normally when there is a fracas, everybody starts shouting. (The reason for the silence here was that the chaps concerned were local Amerinds, and the rest Chinese; and both of these peoples have some considerable sense, in time of crisis.)

Staying under the pitch shadows of the forest, Raies pointed to a knot of people around an animated bundle. Jimmy was in the middle. He was rolling about on the hard-beaten earth and was obviously either wounded or trussed. Just then a gang came trotting out of a sort of warehouse building, bearing a litter. I knew it was then or never.

"Raies," I whispered, "You have done enough, my good friend. This is not your business; and I don't want your brothers hit either (there were three Caribs with us). You try and get us out if you can, but *don't* take any risks ....you understand what I say...."risks"....?"

"Yes," he said simply.

"OK," I said, "take this," and I handed him my own (trusted, ha-ha) automatic. "You shoot?" I asked. He nodded.

Then I took my "ultimate weapon," as I called it, out of my belt, and walked out into the lights, rapidly and authoritatively. It took them completely by surprise, as a quiet and obvious move always does when it is unexpected. In fact, I was right up to the lot before anybody realized that I was there. I let go with a very imperious order. (Actually, I used a command employed by Burmese elephant trainers, known as Oozies, that sounded just like Hitler commanding the entire Third Reich to genuflect.) The result was almost funny.

There were about twenty of them by then, and the whole lot jumped around and stared, lowering whatever weapons they had. There was a big, very fat Chinese on my side. His mouth opened. I gave him a dart in the stomach and he keeled over. That got action. I did not want to say a word in English, so I barked the first gibberish that came into my head. They dropped all kinds of hardware and just stood there. Jimmy gave a great groan, raised his head, and yelled, "Get him."

Of course I did not know who he meant, but, taking a quick dekko around, I spotted one more obvious Chinese gentleman. So I took a gamble. I waved him off in the general direction of Raies with the barrel of my neat little weapon. He had seen what it had done to his pal, and, believe me, he pushed off fast. Then a whole batch of new chaps started running out of the buildings towards us. Thank God, the bloody lights stayed on. I began to back off, and indicated to some of the Amerinds standing around shivering with fright that they pick up Jimmy and follow.

And so we retreated at a fair clip, as the new contingent let loose with rotten rifle-fire. Then I saw Raies and his brothers emerge and start running for Jimmy. The Indians dropped him and just sailed away. The new lot suddenly stopped and were getting ready to drop to their knees and start really aiming. There was a white man in a clean white shirt who was apparently in charge. I took very careful aim and let him have a dart. He clutched his stomach, did a sort of little dance, staggered a bit, and crashed over. His "troops" wavered and then ran. Rifle fire broke out from the bigger buildings behind. I had had enough.

Dodging and weaving, I regained the shadows and

followed the slight noises of Jimmy being toted away ahead. Then, God-damn-it, a stray bullet hit one of my Caribs in the back. I did not know what had happened and tripped over him. It takes more than one bullet to kill a Carib, and the fellow instinctively rounded on me with his machete. Luckily he was so hurt that he got it blade-side-be-back and so only broke two of my ribs. If he had known what he was doing I would have been cut in two. I keeled over, making noises like a wounded tapir. Raies, bless his black heart, appeared, grabbed me in one hand and his wounded buddy in another, and dragged us off at a jog-trot through the inky blackness.

I came-to in the canoe, gliding gently down the river in the light of dawn. Alongside me lay Jimmy, slumbering like a baby. To the other side lay another Chinese gentleman, trussed up like the proverbial Thanksgiving Turkey. His eyes told me that he was very angry indeed.

I'll cut the historical report short, and merely add that Jimmy had somehow managed to enveigle this trussed person out of the 'factory' by making a lot of noise while approaching and calling out for "aid to lost travellers." When somebody appeared at the gate, Jimmy had asked for his friend, *in Spanish.* When said 'friend' had appeared. Jimmy addressed him in Yunnanese and the man had made like to flee; whereupon Raies had grabbed for, but missed him, but had then chopped the poor guard's head off with his machete to avoid undue noise, and they had started back. But the light came on and Jimmy had "rounded." Raies sensibly had hightailed it to us. Luckily, we got back before they had time to tote Jimmy into the factory. He had been plugged, but was still awake and had ammunition enough to keep the local guard at bay. They awaited the Chinese hierarchy. The fat Oriental I had plugged happened (very luckily) to have been said "trussed gentleman's" loyal communist ally.

We drifted 'round a sharp bend in the river just before it became tidal, and literally bumped into the big launch. There were half a dozen fellows dressed like soldiers in it, but they had not heard us coming and seemed to have been asleep—as is the local custom. Before they could get arms to the ready, our party attacked. I really regret to have to say that we won.

Only one man, the engineer, actually 'attacked,' and so had to be disposed of; the rest were locals. So we disarmed them, gave them a stiff drink, showed them how to start their engine, and pointed them back upstream. Then we hoisted sail, caught the trades, and slewed out in the blessed Caribbean.

Jimmy had a very badly plugged shoulder, and I had a nasty feeling that the bullet had tipped his right lung. We had toted along some "western-type" first-aid, but, as always, Raies administered the most nauseating but effective remedies, which not only did the trick but alleviated Jimmy of almost all pain. Funny people, the Caribs. My "hurt" Raies did not seem to take much account of, so that it was a rather painful journey.

Persuading our "trussed-one" to talk was also a bit painful, but we had our methods; and talk he did, and before we got back to the Viverros Cays. In fact, once we got him persuaded, he would not stop talking, until even Jimmy yelled at him to be quiet. He was a Cantonese, but he understood Yunnanese, and was apparently the basis of all our immediate trouble. BUT....

I am afraid that I got rather rough with the fellow on the second day. I was hurting and fed up with listening to a lot of Chinese expletives, so I gave him a real good kick on the arse and told him to talk English... and, by Jove, he *did!* Jimmy was horrified at my action but I pressed my point, holding my treasured little device on his face. And the guy, uncommunicative Oriental or not, really talked. And, what do you know? He blamed it all on our pal Ainno Leptemkius; our "brilliant" refugee office manager!

Refugee, my foot! By the time I got through with *him,* the day after we got back to HQ, I had not only the whole local story, but as much as he knew of the commie master-plan, as applied locally; the identity of a whole bunch of their agents; and even some alleged code factors—though I never really believed that.

I should add a note here, (in parentheses) that Jimmy's *real* Yunnanese pal at the gold mine had, it turned out later, been poisoned by these two Cantonese commie agents. He was never replaced because Yunnanese are hard to come by in wartime. I was very sorry, but the "good" Chinese people at the mine eventually paid him

some very honorable and touching posthumous respects—when they eventually learned the truth. It's a sad world, but at least there were then still people who retained a decent respect for their ancestors.

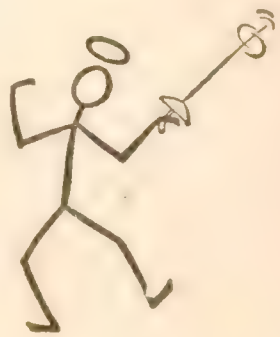
We bundled pals ex-Lithuania and ex-Canton up very tightly and shipped them off to protective custody, as the saying goes in wartime; but it was really rather sad that the former operative lost his hearing and power of speech two days out on the trip. When I heard this piece of intelligence, Sergeant Abercrombie happened to be in my office. I read the report to him. He came to attention and remarked something like: "Tshik, tsik. Sir, those Carib man very bad; for truth. . . ." I cut him short.

"Yes, Sergeant," I said, "so are white men, I am sorry to have to say."

The sergeant saluted smartly, about faced, and marched out.

I took the little thing out of my belt and fondled it. Seventy, curare-tipped, little, shiny needles: (with light glass points, of course) in the butt of a small automatic with a place for a 'gas-bottle', looking like an easy answer to a Hollywood scriptwriter's prayer for instant club-soda. We didn't know about instant soporifics in those days, so the little darts had to kill. Handy, quiet, and very effective in a tight corner. But my friends the Caribs did know of *other* things that one could put into these little points that did *not* kill—they just 'stunned,' or stopped people yakking, or sterilized them, or stopped pain, or brought on rhetoric that would floor a debating society, or induced deafness. That's what I call 'clean' fighting: a swipe from a machete is awfully messy.

Well, we won *that* little war, but I often wonder! So did Raies, I know. The whole thing puzzled him a bit. His sister never commented. Nor did Jimmy. After that episode everything returned to abnormal for almost a month. Then we had the blackest outburst of all. . . .



pulp writer

by Cornell Woolrich

The reservation-clerk received a call early that afternoon asking if there was a "nice, quiet" room available, for occupancy at about six o'clock that evening. The caller, a young woman, was evidently a secretary or assistant in some business office or organization; told that there was such a room to be had, she requested: "Will you please hold it for Mr. Edgar Danville Moody. He'll be in around six." And twice more reiterated her insistence on its noiselessness.

"We run a quiet hotel altogether," the desk man assured her with a touch of dryness.

"Good," she said approvingly. "Because we don't want him to be disturbed while he's in it. It's important that he have complete privacy."

"We can promise that," said the desk man.

There are writers who keep regular office hours, from 10 AM to 5 PM, with an hour off for lunch. There are still others who're unable to get anything done unless the radio or hi-fi is blaring, the soothing noises of rush-hour traffic outside their windows in the background. And there are the Edgar Danville Moodys... Cornell Woolrich, one of the all-time greats in this field, calls this "a semi-autobiographical vignette"....

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"Thank you," said the caller.

"You're welcome," answered the desk man.

The designated registrant arrived considerably after six, but not late enough for the reservation to have been voided altogether. He was young; if no longer under thirty in actuality, still well under it in appearance. He had tried to remedy this (probably to him) not desirable discrepancy by coaxing a very slim, very tenuous mustache out along his upper lip. It failed completely in its desired effect. It was like a make-believe mustache pencilled on a child's face.

He was a tall, lean young man. His attire was eye-catching; it stopped just short of being theatrically flamboyant. Or, depending on the viewer's own tastes, just crossed the line. It being already chilly tonight for this early in the season, he was enveloped in a spreading coat of fuzzy sand-colored texture, known generically as camel-hair, with a belt gathered whiplash-tight around its middle. On the other hand, chilly or not, he had no hat.

His necktie was patterned in regimental stripes, but they were perhaps the wrong regiments, selected from opposing armies. He carried a pipe clenched between his teeth, but with the bowl empty and turned down. A band of silver encircled the stem. His shoes, finally, were piebald affairs, with saddles of mahogany hue and the remainder yellow. Nor did they have eyelets and laces, but were made like moccasins, to be thrust on the foot whole; a fringed leather tongue overhung each vamp.

He was liberally burdened with belongings, but none of these were of the order of conventional, clothes-carrying pieces of baggage. Under one arm he held tucked a large flat square wrapped in brown paper and string-tied, suggesting a picture-canvas. In that same hand he carried a large wrapped parcel, also brown-paper-bound; in the other a cased portable typewriter. From one pocket of the coat protruded rakishly a long oblong, once again brown-paper-wrapped.

Though he was alone, and not unduly noisy either in his movements or his speech, his arrival had about it an aura of flurry and to-do, as of something of vast consequence taking place. This of course might have derived from the unsubdued nature of his clothing. In later life, he was not going to be the

kind of man who is ever retiring or inconspicuous.

He disencumbered himself of all his paraphernalia, some onto the floor and some onto the desk-top, and inquired: "Is there a room waiting for Edgar Danville Moody?"

"Yes, sir, there certainly is," said the clerk cordially.

"Good and quiet, now?" he warned intently.

"You won't hear a pin drop," promised the clerk.

He signed floridly and with a flourish.

"Are you going to be with us long, Mr. Moody?" the clerk asked.

"It better not be too long," was the enigmatic answer, "or I'm in trouble."

"Take the gentleman up, Joe," hosted the clerk.

Joe began collecting the articles one by one.

"Wait a minute, not Gertie!" he was suddenly enjoined.

Joe looked around behind him, first on one side, then on the other. There was no one at all standing there. "Gertie?" he said blankly.

Young Moody picked up the portable typewriter, patted the lid affectionately. "This is Gertie," he enlightened him. "I'm superstitious. I don't let anyone carry her but me when we're out on a job together."

They entered the elevator together, Moody carrying Gertie.

Joe held his peace for the first two floors, but beyond that he was incapable of continuing to do so. "I never heard of a typewriter called Gertie," he remarked wonderingly, turning his head from the controls.

"I've worn out six," Moody proclaimed proudly. "Gertie's my seventh." He gave the lid another little love-pat. "My first was Alice. I call them alphabetically. You know, like they do hurricanes."

Joe was vastly engrossed. "How could you wear out six, like that? Mr. Elliot's had the same one in his office for four years now, ever since I first came to work here, and he hasn't wore his out yet."

"Who's he?" said Moody.

"The hotel accountant."

"Aw-w-w," drawled Moody with vast disdain. "No wonder. He just writes figures. I'm a *writer*."

Joe was all but mesmerized. "Gee, are you a writer?" he said batedly. "I always wanted to be a writer myself."

Moody was too interested in his *own* being a writer to acknowledge the other's wish to be one too.

"You write under your own name?" hinted Joe, unable to take his eyes off him.

"Pretty much so." He gave it to him. "Dan Moody. Ever read me?"

Joe was too innately naive to prevaricate plausibly. He scratched the back of his head. "Let me see now," he said. "I'm trying to think."

Moody's face dropped discontentedly, all but into a sulk. However in a moment it had cleared again. "I guess you don't get much time to read, anyway, on a job like this," he explained to the satisfaction of the two of them.

"No, I don't, but I'd sure like to read something of yours," said Joe fervently. "Especially now that I know you." He wrenched at the lever, and the car began to reverse. It had gone up three floors too high, so intense had been his absorption.

Joe showed him into the room and disposed of his encumberances. Then he lingered there, unable to tear himself away. Nor did this have anything to do with the delay in the tip; for once, and in complete sincerity, Joe had forgotten all about there being such a thing.

Moody shed his tent-like topcoat, cast it back onto a chair with a billowing overhead fling like a person about to immerse in a bath. Then he began to burst open brown paper with an explosive sound all over the room.

From the flat square came an equally flat, equally square cardboard mat, blank on the reverse side, protected by tissues on the obverse. Moody peeled these off to reveal a, to say the least, startling composition in vivid oil-paints. Its main factors were a plump-breasted girl in a disheveled lavender-colored dress desperately fleeing from a pursuer, the look on whose face promised her even additional dishevelment.

Joe became goggle-eyed, and remained so. Presently he took a step nearer, but remained transfixed as before. Moody stood it on the floor, upright against a chair-bottom.

"You do that?" Joe breathed in awe.

"No, the artist. It's next month's cover. I have to do a story to match up with it."

Joe said, puzzled: "I thought they did it the other way around. Wrote the story first, and then illustri-ated it."

"That's on the inside," Moody said, professionally glib. "They pick a feature story each month, and put that one on the cover. This time they had a little trou-

ble. The fellow that was supposed to do the feature didn't come through on time, got sick or something. So the artist had to start off first, without waiting any more for him. Now there's no more time left, so I have to rustle up one to fit the cover."

"Gee," said Joe, whisperingly fearful. "Going to be hard, isn't it?"

"Once you get started, it goes by itself. It's just getting started that I don't like."

From the bulkier parcel had come, in the interim, two sizable slabs wrapped alike in dark-blue covering paper. He wrenched one open to extract a ream of white first-sheets, the other to extract a ream of manila second-sheets.

"I'm going to use this table, here," he decided, and planted one stack on one corner of it, the second stack on the opposite corner. Between the two he placed the typewriter, Gertie, in position of honor.

Also from the same parcel had come a pair of soft house-slippers, crushed together toe-to-heel and heel-to-toe. He dropped them under the table. "I can't write with my shoes on," he explained to the disciple - immovable Joe. "Nor with the neck of my shirt buttoned," he added, parting that and flinging his tie off.

From the slender pocket-slanted oblong, last of the wrapped shapes, came a carton of cigarettes. The pipe, evidently reserved for non-occupational hours, he promptly discarded.

"Now, is there an ash-tray?" he queried, like a commander surveying an intended field of action.

Joe darted in and out again of several corners of the room. "Gee, no, the last people must have swiped it," he said, discomfited. "Wait a minute, I'll go get—"

"Never mind, I'll use this instead," decided Moody, bringing over a metal waste-basket. "The amount of ashes I make when I'm working, a tray wouldn't be enough to hold them all, anyway."

The phone gave a very short ring, querulously interrogative. Moody picked it up, then relayed to Joe: "The man downstairs wants to know what's holding you, why you don't come down."

Joe gave a start, came back to his everyday employment level from the rarefied heights of artistic creation he had been floating about in. He couldn't bear to turn his back, he started to retreat toward the door instead. "Is

there anything else—?" he said regretfully.

Moody passed a crumpled bill to him from his pocket. "Bring me back a—let's see, this is a cover-story—you better make it an even dozen bottles of beer. It relaxes me when I'm working. Light, not dark."

"Right away, Mr. Moody," said Joe eagerly, beating a hasty retreat.

While he was gone, Moody made his penultimate preparations: sitting down to remove his shoes and put on the slippers, bringing within range and adjusting the focus of a shaded floor-lamp, shifting the horrendous work-of-art back against the baseboard of the opposite wall so that it faced him squarely from just over the table.

Then he went and asked for a number on the phone, without having to look it up.

A young woman said: "Peerless. Good evening."

He said: "Mr. Tarter's office, please."

Another young woman said: "Mr. Tarter's office."

He said: "Hello, Cora. This is Dan Moody. I'm up here and I'm all set. Did Mr. Tarter go home yet?"

"He left half-an-hour ago," she said. "He left his home-number with me, told me to give it to you; he wants you to call him in case you run into any difficulties, have any problems with it. But not later than eleven, they go to bed early out there in East Orange."

"I won't have any trouble," he said self-assuredly. "How long have I been doing this?"

"But this is a cover-story. He's very worried. We have to go to the printer by nine tomorrow, we can't hold him up any longer."

"I'll make it, I'll make it," he said. "It'll be on his desk waiting for him at eight-thirty."

"Oh, and I have good news for you. He's not only giving you Bill Hammond's rate on this one—two-and-a-half cents a word—but he told me to tell you that if you do a good job, he'll see to it that you get that extra additional bonus over and above the word-count itself that you were hinting about when he first called you today."

"Yip-pee!" he exclaimed ebulliently.

A note of maternal instruction crept into her voice. "Now get down to work and show him what you can do. He really thinks a lot of you, Dan. I'm not supposed to say this. And try to have it down here before he comes in to-

morrow. I hate to see him worry so. When he worries, I'm miserable along with him. Good luck." And she got off.

Joe came back with the beer, six bottles in each of two paper sacks, one on each arm.

"Put them on the floor alongside the table, where I can just reach down," instructed Moody.

"He bawled the heck out of me downstairs, but I don't care, it was worth it. Here's a bottle-opener the delicatessen-people gave me."

"That about kills what I gave you," Moody calculated, fishing into his pocket. "Here's—"

"No," protested Joe sincerely, with a dissuading gesture. "I don't want any tip from *you*, Mr. Moody. You're different from other people that come in here. You're a Writer, and I always wanted to be a writer myself. But if I could ever get to read a story of yours—" he said wistfully.

Moody promptly rummaged in the remnants of the disheveled brown paper, came up with a magazine which had been entombed there. "Here, here's last month's." "I was taking it home with me, but I can get another at the office."

It's title was *Startling Stories!*, complete with exclamation-point. Joe wiped his fingertips reverently against his uniform before touching it, as though afraid of defiling it.

Moody opened it for him, offered it to him that way. "Here I am, here," he said. "Second-lead story. That means second in from the beginning. Next month I'm going to be the lead story, going to open the book, on account of doing the cover-story." He harked back to his humble beginnings for an indulgent moment. "When I first began, I used to be all the way in the back of the book. You know, where the muscle-building ads are."

" 'Killing Time, by Dan Moody,' " Joe mouthed softly, like someone pronouncing a litany.

"They always change your titles on them, I don't know why," Moody complained fretfully. "My own title for that one was 'Out of the Mouths of Guns'. Don't you think that's better?"

"Wouldje—?" Joe was fumbling with a pencil, half-afraid to offer it.

Moody benevolently drew the pencil from his fingers, wrote on the margin alongside the story-title: "The

best of luck to you, Joe—Dan Moody", Joe the while supporting the magazine from underneath with the flats of both hands, like an acolyte making an offering at some altar.

"Gee," Joe breathed, his eyes suffused with the soft light of worship. "I'm going to keep this forever. I'm going to run transparent paper over it, so it won't get rubbed off, where you wrote." Although he didn't actually press it back against his breast, open as it was, he made a slight gesture almost indicative of that.

"I would have done it in ink for you," Moody said benignly. "Only the pulp paper won't take it, it soaks it up like a blotter."

The phone gave another of its irritable, foreshortened blats.

Joe jumped guiltily, hastily backed toward the door. "I better get back on duty, or he'll be raising cain down there." He half closed the door, reopened it to add: "If there's anything you want, Mr. Moody, just call down for me. I'll drop anything I'm doing and jump right up here."

"Thanks, I will, Joe," Moody promised, with the warm, comfortable smile of someone whose ego has just been talcumed and cuddled in cotton-wool.

"And good luck to you on the story. I'll be rooting for you!"

"Thanks again, Joe."

Joe closed the door deferentially, holding the knob to the end, so that it should make a minimum of noise and not disturb the mystic creative process about to begin in there.

Before it did, however, Moody went to the phone and asked for a nearby Connecticut number. A soprano that sounded like a schoolgirl's, but might have been misleading by a few years, got on.

"It's me, honeybunch," Moody said.

The voice had been breathless already, so it couldn't get any more breathless; what it did do was not get any less breathless, and go up even higher. "What happened? Ooh, hurry up, tell me! I can't wait. Did you get the cover? Did you get it?"

"Yes, I got it! I'm in the hotel-room right now, and they're paying all the charges. And listen to this: I'm getting Bill Hammond's word-rate, two-and-a-half cents—"

A squeal of sheer ecstasy answered him.

"And wait a minute, you

didn't let me finish. If he likes the job, I'm even getting an extra, additional bonus on top of all that. Now what do you have to say to that?"

The squeals became multiple this time; two or three of them instead of just one. Then when they had subsided, "Oh, I'm so proud of you!"

"Is Sonny-bun awake yet?"

"Yes. I knew you'd want to say goodnight to him, so I kept him up. Wait a minute, I'll go and get him."

The voice faded, came back again. It seemed, however, to be as unaccompanied as before. "Say something to Daddy. Daddy's right here. Daddy wants to hear you say something to him."

Silence.

"Hello, Sonny-bun. How's my little snooky? How's my little fellow?" Moody coaxed.

Silence.

The soprano mentoring voice said: "Daddy's going to do a big, important job. Aren't you going to wish him luck?"

There was a bated pause, and then like the startled cluck of a little barnyard fowl, "Lock!"

The squeals of delight this time came from both sides of the line, and in both timbres, soprano and tenor. "He wished me luck! Did you hear that? He wished me luck! That's a good omen. Now it's bound to be a lulu of a story!"

The soprano voice was too taken up distributing smothered kisses over what seemed to be a considerable surface-area to be able to answer.

"Well," he said, "guess I better get down to business. I'll be home before noon; I'll take the ten-forty-five back, after I turn the story in at Tarter's office."

The parting became breathless, flurried and tripartite.

"Do a bang-up job now/ "I'll make it a smasheroo/ "Remember, Sonny-bun and I are rooting for you/ "Miss me/"And you miss us, too/ *S m a c k, smack,/ S m a c k, smack,/ Gluck!*

He hung up smiling, sighed deeply to express his utter satisfaction with his domestic lot. Then he turned away, lathered his hands briskly, and rolled up his shirtsleeves. The preliminaries were out of the way, the creative process was about to begin.

The creative process, that mystic life-force, that splurge, out of which has come the Venus de Milo, the Mona Lisa, the *Fantasie Impromptu,* the Bayeux tapes-

tries, Romeo and Juliet, the windows of Chartres Cathedral, Paradise Lost—and a pulp murder-story by Dan Moody. The process is the same in all; if the results are a little uneven, that doesn't invalidate it any.

He sat down before Gertie and, noting that the oval of light from the work-lamp fell on the machine, to the neglect of the polychrome cardboard mat which slanted in comparative shade against the wall, adjusted the pliable lamp-neck so that the luminous egg was cast on the drawing instead, and the typewriter was deprived of it. He didn't need it on the typewriter. He never looked at the keys when he wrote, nor at the pages before him; using a hit-or-miss system in the hectic pace of his fingering. If he sometimes struck the wrong letters, they took care of that down at the office, Tarter had special proof-readers for that. That wasn't his job, he was the creator, he couldn't be bothered with little picayune details like that. By the same token, he never went back over what he had once written and reread it; he couldn't afford to, at two cents a word (his regular rate, previous to now), and at the pressure under which he worked. Besides, it was his experience that it always came out best the first time; if you went back and fiddled around with it, you only spoiled it.

He palmed a sheet of white paper off the top of the stack, inserted it singly into the roller. Ordinarily he made a sandwich of it, a white sheet on top, a carbon sheet in the middle, and a yellow sheet on bottom; that was in case the story should go astray in transmission through the mail, or be misled down at the office before the cashier had issued a check for it. It wasn't necessary in this case; he was delivering the story personally to Tarter's desk, it was a rush-order, and it was expected. It would waste several extra moments between each page to make up one of those sandwiches, and besides, those yellow second-sheets cost forty-five cents a ream at Goldsmith's (fifty-five elsewhere). You had to watch your costs in this line of work.

He lit a cigarette, the first of the many that were invariably to follow, that always accompanied the writing of every story, the cigarette-to-begin-on. He blew a blue pinwheel of smoke, craned his neck slightly, and star-

ed hard at the master-plan before him, there against the wall. And now for the first line. That was always the gimmick in every one of these stories. Until you had it, you couldn't get into one; once you had it, the story started to unravel by itself from there on, it was easy going after that, clear sailing. It was like plucking the edge of the gauze up from an enormous criss-crossed bandage.

The first line, the first line— He stared intently, almost hypnotically.

Better begin with the girl —she was very prominent on there—and then bring the hero in later. Let's see, she was wearing a violet evening dress—

The little lady in the violet evening-dress came hurrying terrifiedly down the street, looking back in terror. Behind her —

His hands poised avariciously, then drew back again. No, wait a minute, she wouldn't be wearing an evening-dress on the street, violet or any other color. Well, she'd have to change into it later in the story, then, that was all. In a twenty-thousand-word novelette there was plenty of room for her to change into an evening-dress. Just a single line would do it, anywhere along. "She went home, changed her dress, and then came back again".

Now let's try it again.

The beautiful red-head came hurrying down the street, looking back in terror. Behind her—

Again he got stuck. Yes, but who was after her, and what had she done for them to be after her for? That was the problem.

I started in too soon, he decided. I better begin further back, where she does something that gets somebody after her. Then the chase can come in after that.

The cigarette was at an end, without having ignited anything other than itself. He started a new one.

Now let's see. What would a beautiful, innocent, *good* girl like that do, that would be likely to get somebody after her? She had to be good; Tarter was very strict about that. ("I don't want any lady-bums in my stories. If you have to introduce a lady-bum into one of my stories, see that you kill her off as soon as you can. And whatever you do, don't let her get next to the hero too much. Keep her away from the hero. It only weakens the hero. If he falls for her, he's a sap. And if he doesn't fall

for her, he's too much of a goody-good. Keep her in the background; just let her open the door in a negligee when the big-shot gangster drops in for a visit. Then close the door again fast.")

He swirled a hand around in his hair, in a massage-like motion, dropped it to the table, pummelled the edge of the table with it twice, like when you're trying to start a balky drawer open. Let's see, let's see. She could find out something that she's not supposed to, and then *they* find out that she has found out, and they start after her to shut her up—Good enough; that was it! Now, *how* did she find it out? She could go to a beauty-parlor, and in the next booth overhear—No beauty parlors were too feminine; Tarter wouldn't allow one of them in his stories. Besides, he, Moody, had never been in one, wouldn't have known how to describe it on the inside. She could be in a phone-booth, and through the partition—No, he'd used that gambit in the August issue, in *Death Drops a Slug*.

A little lubrication was indicated here; something to help make the wheels go around, soften up the kinks. With well-versed dexterity, he picked up the bottle-opener Joe had left for him, reached down to the floor, brought up a bottle, and uncapped it, still with that same one hand, using the edge of the table for leverage. He poured a very little into the tumbler, and did no more than chastely moisten his lips with it.

Now. She could get a package at her house, and it was meant for somebody else, and—

He had that peculiar instinctive feeling that comes when someone is looking at you intently, steadfastly. He shook it off with a slight quirk of his head. It remained in abeyance for a moment or two, then slowly settled on him again.

The story-thread dropped in a hopeless snarl, just as he was about to get it through the needle's eye of the first line.

He turned his head, to dissipate the feeling by glancing in the vacant direction from which it seemed to assail him. It wasn't vacant. There was a pigeon standing utterly motionless on the ledge just outside the pane of the window. Its head was cocked inquiringly, it was turned profileward toward him, and it was staring scrutinizingly in at him with just the one eye. But the eye was

almost *leaning* over toward the glass, and it was so intent; less than an inch or two away from it.

As he stared back, the eye solemnly blinked. Just once; gave no other indication of life.

He ignored it, as being a form of life beneath him; turned back to his task.

There's a ring at the bell, she goes to the door, and a man hands her a pack—

His eyes crept uncontrollably over to their extreme outer corners, as if trying to take a peek without his knowledge. He brought them back with a reprimanding knitting of the brows. Almost at once, they started over that way again. Just knowing it was standing out there like that, seemed to attract them almost magnetically.

He turned his head toward it again. This time he gave it a good, baleful scowl. "Get off of there," he mouthed at it. "Go somewhere else." Speaking by lip-motion alone, because the intervention of the glass prevented hearing.

It blinked again. More slowly than the first time, if a pigeon's blink can be measured. Scorn, contempt, seemed to be expressed by the deliberateness of its blink.

Never slow to be affronted, he kindled at once. He swung his arm violently around toward it, in a complete half-circle of riddance. Its wing-feathers erupted a little, subsided again, as if the faintest of breezes had caressed them, no more. Then with stately pomp it waddled around in a complete circle, brought the other side of its head around toward the glass, and stared at him with the eye on that side.

Heatedly, he jumped from his chair, strode to the window, and flung it up. "I told you to get off of there!" he said threateningly. He gave the air immediately over the surface of the ledge a thrashing swipe with his arm.

It eluded this with no more difficulty than a child jumping very thick rope. Only, instead of coming down again as the rope passed, it stayed up. It made a little looping journey with scarcely-stirring wings, and as soon as his arm was drawn in again, descended once more almost to the precise spot it had stood on before.

Once more they repeated this passage between them, with identical results. It expended far less energy coasting around at safe height than he did flinging his arm hectically about, and he re-

alized that a law of diminishing returns would soon set in on this point. Moreover, the second time he overaimed and crashed the back of his hand into the stone coping alongside the window, so that he had to suck at his knuckles and breathe on them to alleviate the sting.

He had never hated a bird so before. In fact, he had never hated a bird before.

He slammed the window down furiously. Thereupon, as though it realized it had that much more advance warning against possible arm-strikes, it began to strut from one side to the other of the window-ledge. Like a picket, enjoining him from working. Each time it made its turn, it cocked that beady eye at him.

He picked up the metal wastebasket, tested it in his hand for solidity. Then he put it down again regretfully. Even if it knocked the feathered bane off the ledge, it would probably go over with it.

He picked up the phone, to vent his indignation on something human.

"Do I have to have pigeons on my window-sill?" he shouted accusingly. "Why didn't you tell me there were going to be pigeons on my window-sill?"

The clerk was more than taken aback; he was stunned by the onslaught. "I—ah—ah never had a complaint like this before," he finally managed to stammer.

"Well, you've got one now!" Moody let him know with firm disapproval.

"Yes, sir, but—but what's it doing?" the clerk floundered. "Is it making any noise?"

"It doesn't have to," Moody flared. "I just don't want it there!"

There was a momentary pause, during which it was to be surmised the clerk was bafflingly scrubbing the side of his jaw. Or perhaps his temple, or his forehead. Then he came back again, completely at a loss. "I'm sorry, sir—but I don't see what you expect *me* to do about it. You're up there with it, and I'm down here. Haven't —haven't you tried chasing it?"

"Haven't I tried?" choked Moody exasperatedly. "That's all I've been doing! It freewheels out and around and comes right back again!"

"Well, about the only thing I can suggest," the clerk said helplessly, "is to send up a boy with a mop or broom, and have him stand there by the window and—"

"I can't work with a bellboy in here doing sentinel-

duty with a mop or broom slung over his shoulder!" Moody exploded anguishedly. "That'd be worse than the pigeon! Like a golfer always just about to tee off and never doing it."

The clerk breathed deeply, with bottomless patience. "Well, I'm sorry, sir, but—"

Moody got it out first. " 'I don't see what I can do about it,' 'I don't see what I can do about it'!" he mimicked him ferociously. "Thanks! You've been a big help," he said with ponderous sarcasm. "I don't know what I would have done without you!", and hung up.

He looked around at it, a worsted, resigned expression in his eyes that those energetic, enthusiastic irises seldom showed.

It had its neck craned at an acute angle, almost down to the stone sill, but still looking in at him from that oblique perspective, as if to say "Was that about me? Did it have to do with me?"

He went over, threw the window up. That didn't even make it stir any more, only the abrasive arm-swings did.

He turned and went back to his writing-chair. He addressed it coldly from there. Aloud, but coldly, and with the condescension of the superior forms of life toward the inferior ones. "Look. You want to come in? Is that what it's all about? You're dying to come in? You won't be happy till you come in? Then, for the love of Mike come in and get it over with, and let me get back to my work! There's a nice comfortable chair, there's a nice plumpy sofa, there's a nice wide bed-rail for a perch. The whole room is yours. Come in and have yourself a time—"

Its head came up from that sneaky way of regarding him under-wing. It contemplated the invitation. Then its twig-like little vermillion legs dipped, it deposited a little curlycue of matter on the window-ledge, threw him a derogatory chuck of the head, as if to say "That for you and your room!", and took off. This time in a straight, unerring line of final departure.

He detonated to his feet in such a burst of choleric anger that the chair went over. He snatched up the wastebasket, rushed to the window, and swung it virulently. Without any hope, of course, of overtaking its already-vanished target.

"Dirty, damn squab!" he railed bitterly. "Come back here and I'll—! Doing that to me, after I'm nice enough to be willing to let it come

in! I hope you run into a high-tension wire head-first. I hope you run into a hawk—."

His anger, however settled as rapidly as a spent seydlitz powder. He reclosed the window without violence. A smothered chuckle had already escaped from him on his way back to the chair, and he was grinning sheepishly at his own expense as he reached it.

"Feuding with a pigeon, yet," he murmured deprecatingly. "I'd better get a good grip on myself."

Another cigarette, two good hearty gulps of beer, and now, let's see—where were we? The opening line. He stared up at the ceiling. His fingers spread, poised, and then suddenly began to splatter all over the keyboard like heavy drops of rain.

"For me?" the young woman said staring unbelievably at the shifty-eyed man holding the package.

"You're—, ain't ya?"

One hand desisted, two of its fingers snapped, demanding inspiration. "Got to get a name for her," he breathed. He stared fruitlessly at the ceiling for a moment, then glanced over at the window. The abstaining hand resumed.

"You're Pearl Dove, ain't ya?"

"Why, yes, but I wasn't expecting anything."

("Not too much dialogue," Tarter always cautioned. "Get them moving, get them doing something. Dialogue leaves big blanks on the margins of the pages, and the reader feels he doesn't get much reading for his money.")

"He thrust it at her, turned and disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared—"

Two "appeareds" in one line; too much alike. He triphammered the x-key eight times.

"—and disappeared as suddenly as he had showed up. She tried to call him back but he was no longer in sight. Somewhere out in the night the whine of an expensive car taking off came to her ears—"

He frowned, looked around over his shoulder briefly, resumed his task.

"She looked at the package she had been left holding—"

He looked around again, more sharply than before. As soon as the keys stopped castenatting he could hear it more distinctly. It has been just an undertone to his own noise before. Now it was a noise in its own right. It

jangled the radar-system of his nerves. There was water in it; but not the smooth, calm flow of water, unimpeded. This was *rebellious* water. Water that wanted to go somewhere and couldn't. Water that kept coming back from somewhere that it couldn't go. And then new water would come along and try it all over again. In short, water that was in difficulty.

He thought of the bathroom right away, got up and went over to the entrance. It was coming from in there, and the tiled surfaces of the walls and floors—this was an old-fashioned bathroom tiled almost up to its ceiling-joints—gave it a resonant echo, made it reverberate to twice or even thrice its original volume.

It was that ugly, sucking, growling sound that the last of water makes just as it goes down a drain. But this was prolonged interminably, it never finished going down; that was just it, it *couldn't* go down. And it was impossible for tight-keyed nerves, such as his were at the moment, to endure.

He went over to the basin, tried first one tap, then the other. It wasn't they. They made just a slurring, sibilant sound. It was in the wall. Or on the other side of the wall, perhaps. There must be an adjoining bathroom there, backing against this one.

He put his hand tentatively to the bath-door, to close it. That unquestionably would have deadened the sound. Then on second thought he desisted, refusing to compromise like that. The *noise* should stop, he shouldn't have to stop up his doors against it. He had rented this room, and was entitled to all its privileges.

He went toward the phone, reached for it. Again he desisted. They hadn't been of any help in the pigeon episode just now, they wouldn't be in this either. The quickest and surest thing to do was go next-door himself, call the attention of the occupants to this disturbance that was issuing from there.

He left his own door ajar, went down the outside hall. He tapped at the next door below with courteous but firm resolution. That is to say, not aggressively, but not timidly either. There was no immediate answer, and he was beginning to think the room might be vacant, and was just about to knock a second time, when unexpectedly a feminine voice said from just the other side of it: "Yes? Who?"

"Your neighbor," he said dignifiedly. (It is very difficult to be dignified before a closed door). "I would like to talk to you a minute, please."

The door opened promptly, if narrowly, and a lady of past-middleage stood looking at him. Her steel-gray hair was gathered up in numbers of metallic clinchers or fasteners, her glasses were steel-rimmed and made her look intransigeant, and her steel-gray bathrobe was caught and held tight just under her chin, with commendable but none the less wholly academic modesty.

She peered at him. "Yes?" she said. "What is?" She seemed to have a tendency to drop her terminal participles.

"There's something wrong in your bathroom," he said. "I'm on the other side of you, and I'm trying to do some work in there, and—"

"What, wrong?" she said impatiently. "I was in there, just. Wrong, is nothing."

"I can hear it on my side, plainly." He too grew a trifle impatient, now. "The water keeps slogging around in the pipes. The kind of work I do, I have to concentrate, and—"

Now she regarded him with obvious disfavor. "This, you tell me you hear? No, hear this you couldn't possibly. You making jokes, no?"

"Madam," he said coldly, "I'm too busy to make jokes, and knock on strangers' doors like this—"

Disfavor was becoming indignation; haughty indignation at that. "Young man," she said sternly. "Is all right with you, I carry out my doctor's orders? I have your permission? *You* pay my doctor-bills? *I* pay my doctor-bills? Which is?"

He was somewhat at a loss, but refused to concede. "I don't see what your doctor-bills have to—"

She held up three fingers. Of the hand that didn't guard the coverage of her chest. Three angrily-palpitating fingers. "Three weeks, I couldn't speak a word. Lurring-guy-tiss. Five dollars it costs me, he comes to my room. *Him* I pay, and now *you're* going to tell me what I should do. Three glasses every night, he tells me, before retiring, *goggle* with I'm going to."

He was stunned. So incredulous for a moment, his jaw hung slack. *"Gargling?* Is that what you're trying to tell me it was? Gargling? It couldn't be! That's imposs— Why, it sounded like Niagara Falls going over on the Canadian side!"

She was definitely inimic-

al, had been for some time. "You don't approve," she told him hostilely. "I don't do it to suit you. You're going to tell me how to goggle in my own bathroom. He tells me I should goggle hard. But for you I should goggle weak, maybe. Yes?"

Unable to worst her in any way, he seized on a technical flaw as the only means of getting back at her. "There's an 'r' in it!" he snapped annoyedly. "Do you have to drop it out every time? Can't you even say it right?"

"You're very smot, aren't you?" she sneered. "A very smot young gentleman. You're going to come around and give me lessons, how to do it right and how to say it right. Before you were born, was I goggling!"

"I'm only interested in one thing!" he said heatedly. "Are you through? Is that all for tonight? Can I get on with my work now?"

"For being so smot, I got news for you!" she cried with equal heat. "Three glasses, is all he told me. But you got to come to my door, make me stand here in the draft. Now just for that, I make it four glasses. I go back and do a whole nother glass right now, loud as could be done. I show you!" She closed the door with cartridge-like sharpness.

He strode back to his own. For a moment, and for only a moment, his room was still, calm, restful; the way a room should be in which work of a creative nature is to be done. Then she, apparently, regained her former location. The moment's hiatus ended. With a fine guttural surge the rebellious waters resumed their turmoil.

But there was a new factor this time, that hadn't been present before. There was the *will* to gargle hard, there was the *intent* to gargle deep. It had been a casual affair before, now it was a purposeful one. If gargling can be said to be basso profundo, this was it. It was like the chattering of an enormous barrel-chested ape on a tropical treetop, who at stated intervals kept explosively spitting out something he was eating.

"Cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, SPLUTT!

Cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, SPLA-ATT!"

He rushed in there, went up close to the wall, and raised his fist threateningly. But he held it back; he realized he would only be hurting the one party involved who was completely blameless: namely, himself. He wouldn't

be hurting her, and he wouldn't be hurting the wall; he'd only be hurting his own hand, maybe to the extent of not being able to work with it.

The thing to do was still to close the bath-door, leaving her in effect in possession of the field of battle. Even he could recognize this. But there was something in his character that wouldn't let him compromise, when he was certain that he was in the right; a quality that perhaps was going to be an admirable asset later on in his life, but that in the present incident held him at a crippling disadvantage.

Then something happened at the end of one of the iambics. Instead of the expansive upsurge, there was a smothered intake.

"Cully, cully, cully, cully, cully, cully—glup."

And then a stunned silence. The last throatful had never come back. There was the tiny chink of a glass being put down, in order to free the holder's hand for more purposes.

Translating accurately, he pounded his fist jubilantly into his other, supporting palm. "It went down the wrong way!" he gloated. "It back-fired!"

There was a long series of muffled but intense laryngeal acrobatics coming from the other side now, punctuated by whistling intakes of breath.

"Huk, huk, huk, huk, huk, HAWWWK!

Huk, huk, huk, huk, huk, HAWWWK!"

Slowly, very slowly, it tapered off, faded away, and the rhythm of regular breathing, done in silence, replaced it.

He nodded his head darkly. "You won't do any more gargling tonight!" he addressed her aloud. "I bet that's the last time you gargle for many a long night!"

And evidently she was in abject agreement. Not another sound came through from then on, not even the slightest whisper of one; not even the vanquished, receding slither of a soft-soled bedroom-slipper, stealing away.

He returned from this almost poetic triumph and vindication with renewed zest to his table and his Gertie. He didn't bother consulting what he had written so far; such fussy niceties were for smooth-paper writers and the like. In such stories as the one he was on it was almost impossible to break the thread of the action, anyway. It could show up anywhere next, from the end of one

paragraph to the beginning of another. Just so long as it kept going, that was all that mattered. If there was too much of a gap, Tarter's proofreaders could knit it together with a couple of words. They often made gaps of their own, anyway, to make room for some calisthenic or truss-ad.

He drained the beer in the glass, refilled it, stared up at the ceiling. The wide, blank expanse of this gave his characters more room to move around as his mind's eye conjured them up.

"She has a boy-friend who's on the Homicide Squad," he murmured confidentially "Not really a boy-friend, just sort of a brotherly protector." ("Don't give 'em sweethearts," was Tarter's admonishment, "just give 'em pals. You might want to kill the girl off, and if she's already his sweetheart, you can't do it or he loses face with the readers.") "She calls him up to tell him she has received a mysterious package. He tells her not to open it, he'll be right out—" The rest was fingerwork. Fast and furious. The keys dipped and rose individually like a canopy of leaves shot through by a wind.

The page jumped up out of the roller by itself, and he knew he'd struck off the last line there was room for. He pitched it aside to the floor without even glancing at it, cranked in a new one. That was the great thing about Gertie—and all her sisters—as he manipulated them; they were practically self-operating. The little warning bell took care of the lateral margin, and when the bottom margin had been reached the page popped up like a thin white slice of toast from a toaster. It was very good for speed-writing, such as his. He could concentrate on his ceiling-tableaux, and just forget the machine.

He reached down for a new bottle, uncapped it, and poured until a cream-puff of a head burgeoned at the top of it.

They were at the business of opening the package now. He stalled for two lines, to give himself time to improvise what was going to be in it, which he hadn't had an opportunity to do until now—

He stared down at it. Then his eyes narrowed and he nodded grimly.

"What do you make of it?" she breathed, clutching her throat.

Then he was smack up against it, and the improvisation had to be here and **now.**

The keys coasted to a reluctant but full stop. There was almost smoke coming from them by now, or else it was from his ever-present cigarette, drifting past the machine the long way around.

There were always certain staples that were good for finding in mysterious packages, of course. Opium-pellets —but that meant, for some wholly libellous reason, bringing in a Chinese villain, and the menace on the cover-drawing over there wasn't Chinese.

He got up abruptly, swung his chair out away from the table, and shifted it further over, directly under the phantom tableau on the ceiling that had come to a halt as the keys did. The way the figures on a motion-picture screen will freeze into immobility when something goes wrong with the projector.

He got up on the chair-seat with both feet, craned his neck, peered intently and with complete sincerity. He was only about two feet away from the visualization this way. This little bit of fetishism, or idiosyncrasy or whatever it was, had worked for him before in similar stoppages, and it did now. He could see the inside of the package, he could see the cotton-wool that lined it, he could see—

He jumped lithely down again, looped the chair back into place, speared avidly at the keys.

Uncut diamonds!

"Aren't they beautiful?" she said, clutching her throat.

(Well, if there were too many clutches in there, Tarter's hirelings could take one of them out. It was always hard to know what to give your female characters to do with their hands, anyway. Clutching the throat and holding the heart were his own two favorite standbys. The men could always be holding a gun or swinging a punch at someone, but it wasn't refined for women to do that throughout a whole story.)

"Beautiful but hot," he growled.

Her eyes widened. "How do you know?"

"They're the Espinoza consignment, they've been missing for a week." He unlimbered his gun. "This spells trouble for someone."

That was enough dialogue for a few pages, now. He had to get into some fast, red-hot action.

There weren't any more hitches, now. The story flowed like a torrent. The margin-

bell chimed almost staccato, the roller was sludged back with almost piston-like continuity, the pages sprang up almost like blobs of batter from a pancake-skillet. The beer kept rising in the glass and, contradictorily, steadily falling lower. The cigarettes gave up their long thin gray ghosts in a good cause. The mortality-rate was terrible.

His train of thought, the story's lifeline, beer-lubricated but no whit impeded, flashed and sputtered and coursed ahead like topaze lightning in an amber mist, and the fringe-loose fingers and the hiccuping keys followed as best they could. Only once more, before the end, was there a near-hitch, and that wasn't in the sense of a stoppage of thought, but rather of an error in memory, what he mistakenly took to be a duplication. The line:

Hands clutching her throat, Pearl tore down the street in her violet evening-dress—

streamed off the keys, and he came to a lumbering, uneasy halt.

Wait a minute, he'd had that in in the beginning. She couldn't keep running down the street all the time in a violet evening-dress; the readers would get fed up. How'd she get into a violet evening-dress anyway? A minute ago the guy had torn her "white blouse and revealed her quivering white shoulder!"

He half-turned in the chair (and none too steadily), about to essay the almost hopeless task of winnowing through the blanket of white pages that lay all around him on the floor, and then recollection came to his aid just in the nick of time. He remembered now! He'd moved the beginning around to the middle, and begun with the package at the door instead. (It seemed like a long, long time ago that that package had arrived at the door; another-story ago.) This was the first time she'd run down the street in a violet evening-dress, she hadn't done it before. Okay, let her run.

However, logically enough, in order to get her into it in the first place, he x-ed out the line anyway, and put in for groundwork:

"If it hadn't been for your quick thinking, that guy would have got me sure. I'm taking you to dinner tonight, and that's an order."

"I'll run home and change. I've got a new dress I'm dying to break in."

And that took care of that. Ten minutes later (according to story-time, not his), due

to the unfortunate contretemps of her having arrived at the wrong cafe at the wrong time, the line reappeared, now legitimized, and she was duly "tearing down the street, clutching her throat with her violet evening-dress". (The "with" he had intended for an "in".) The line had even gained something by waiting. This time she was screaming as well, which she hadn't been doing the first time out.

And then finally, sometime in the malt-drenched mists ahead, maybe an hour or maybe two hours, maybe two bottles of beer or maybe four, after, a page popped up out of the roller that he had just ground the words "The End" into, and the story was done. It had gone down fighting to the last, but it had gone down, and it was through. It had died of natural causes. Nothing was left to happen in it that hadn't already happened.

He blew out a deep breath, a vacuum - cleaner - deep breath. He let his head go over and rest inertly against the edge of the table for a few moments. Then he got up from the chair unsteadily, very unsteadily, and wavered over toward the bed, treading on the litter of fallen pages. But he had his shoes off anyway, so that didn't hurt them much.

He didn't even hear the springs creak as he flattened out. His ears were already asleep.

Sometime in the early morning, the very early early-morning (just like most days at home), that six-year-old little boy of the neighbors started racing his velocipede up and down in front of the house and trilling the bell incessantly the whole time. Moody stirred and mumbled disconsolately to his wife: "Can't you call out the window and make that brat stay in front of his own house with that damn contraption?"

He struggled up tormentedly on one elbow, and at that point the kid characteristically went back into the house for good, and the ringing stopped. But when Moody opened his blurred eyes, he wasn't at home at all, he was in a hotel room.

"Take your time," a voice said sarcastically. "I've got all day."

Moody switched his head around, stunned, and Tarter, his magazine-editor was standing glaring in at him, Joe holding the room-door open for him. Tarter was short, but impressive. He was of a great age, as Moody's

measurements went, a redwood-tree age, around forty-five or forty-eight or somewhere up there. And right now Tarter wasn't in good humor.

"Twice the printers have called," he raged, "asking if they get that story today or tomorrow!"

Moody's body gave a convulsive jerk and his heels braked against the floor. "Gee, is it that late—?" he gulped.

"No, not at all!" Tarter shouted. "The magazine can come out anytime! Don't let a little thing like that worry you! If Cora hadn't had the presence of mind to call me at my house before I left for the office, I wouldn't have stopped by here like this, and we'd all be waiting around for it down there another hour or two. Now where is it? Let me have it. I'll take it down with me myself in the car—"

Moody gestured helplessly toward the floor, which looked as though a polical rally, with pamphlets, had taken place on it the night before.

"Very systematic," Tarter commented acridly. He surged forward into the room, doubling over into a sort of cushiony right-angle as he did so, and began to back and fill and zig-zag, picking up papers without let, like a very diligent, near-sighted park-attendant spearing leaves at close range. "This is fine right after a heavy breakfast," he added. "The best thing I could do!"

Joe looked pained, but on Moody's behalf, not Tarter's. "I'll help you, sir," he offered placatingly, and started bending and bobbing in turn.

Tarter stopped suddenly, and without rearing, seemed to be trying to read, from the unconventional position of looking straight down from up above. "They're blank," he accused. "Where does it begin?"

"Turn them over," Moody said, wearied with so much fussiness. "They must have fallen on their faces."

"They're that way on both sides, Mr. Moody," Joe faltered, looking unhappier than ever.

"What've you been doing?" Tarter demanded wrathfully. "Wait a minute—!" His head came up to full height again for the first time, he swerved, went over and accosted Gertie, examined the unlidded machine closely.

Then he brought up both fists in air, each still clutching pinwheels of the sterile pages, and pounded them down with maniacal fury, one on each end of the writ-

ing-table. The noise of the concussion was only less than the noise of his unbridled voice.

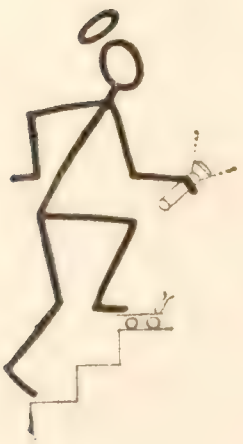
"You damn-fool idiot!" he roared insanely, looking up at the ceiling as if in quest of aid with which to curb his assault - tempted emotions. "You've been pounding thin air all night! You've been beating the hell out of blank paper! *You forgot to put a ribbon in your typewriter!*"

Joe, looking over beyond Tarter, took a quick step forward, arms raised in offered support of somebody or something.

Tarter slashed his hand at him forbiddingly, keeping him where he was. "Don't catch him, let him land," he enjoined, wormwood-bitter. "Maybe a good clunk against the carpet will knock some sense into his stupid—talented—head."

NEXT MONTH —

We begin a two-part study of
Witchcraft and Black Magic with
W.O.G. LOFTS' definitive article—WITCHES



Stories by

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THE TRIPLE 'V' HUNTS CASTRO'S KILLERS ON THE STREETS OF NEW YORK in

WENZELL BROWN's exciting new counter-spy story

THE THIRD BROTHER

—in the April 1967 *THE SAINT MAGAZINE*

the flower of death

by E. Phillips Oppenheim

Fanshaw of the "Home Notes Department," as it was jocularly called at headquarters, bustled into the room where I was passing the time talking to Inspector Hearnshaw.

"Hello, Lyson," he greeted me. "Is this your note?"

He held it out to me—a crisp, though slightly crumpled bank-note for one thousand pounds.

"Well, I wouldn't like to go so far as that," I said, perhaps a little wistfully, "I brought it here. Hearnshaw knows exactly how I came into possession of it."

"It's a very queer story," the Inspector admitted.

"What about the note?" I asked.

"Absolutely genuine," was the decision. "Paper, ink, every mortal thing O.K. That's a Bank of England note for one thousand pounds, and I don't mind telling you that I shouldn't at all mind hav-

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The Prince was enormously wealthy. The whole of his wealth and influence was devoted to fighting the force which he felt had "ruined and corrupted his country". It was this man, a backer of Franco and both hated and dreaded by the rulers of the new Russia, whom Lyson met that night....

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ing the spending of it myself. Catch hold."

He handed the note over to me. I folded it and placed it in my pocket-book.

"What does one do now?" I asked.

Hearnshaw looked dubious.

"Seems to me anything you did would be risky," he remarked. "I should say—spend it quickly, but you might be called upon to refund it!"

"Tell us exactly how you came into possession of it," Fanshaw suggested, passing his cigarette case.

"Simple as A.B.C.," I answered. "I always sit at the same table for luncheon, and very often for dinner, in the Milan Grill Room. I walked in for luncheon the day before yesterday. In due course I shook out my napkin, and this was coiled up inside it. Of course, I thought it was a joke, but as I could not see any indications of the note being a false one, I brought it round to your department here. Now you have just told me it's good."

"Anyone who owes you a thousand pounds likely to return it in that peculiar manner?" Hearnshaw asked.

"Not a soul in the world," I told him.

"Well, if you ask my advice," he decided, "I should stroll into your bank, fill in a credit slip and pay it in. They will give it another test, you may be sure. If they credit it—well then, you had better sit back and see if anything happens."

I picked up my hat and gloves, made my adieux and drove my small coupe round to the West End branch of a famous bank. The cashier welcomed me courteously and accepted the note I passed across.

"Will you credit my account with that, Mr. Ashe?" I asked him, filling in a credit slip.

"Certainly, Captain Lyson. A one-thousand-pound note. Not too many of them going about."

"You have better make certain it's O.K.," I suggested.

"It looks all right," the cashier remarked. "I'll just let our expert have a glance at it, if you have any doubt yourself."

I waited for only a few moments. The man came back smiling.

"Perfectly all right," he observed. "Bring us as many more as you can of them, sir. Anything else we can do for you?"

I cashed a small cheque and called round at the club, where I played a rubber or two of bridge. It was about

seven o'clock when I arrived at the Milan Court, knocked at the door of Louis' small suite on the ground floor, and was promptly bidden to enter. Louis, the beneficent manager of the Grill Room, leaning on his stick, was watching Julie, his daughter, manipulating a cocktail shaker. She turned eagerly toward me as I entered.

"The note?" she exclaimed. "Was it really genuine?"

"Absolutely," I told her.

Julie clapped her hands.

"That means roses for me—or chocolates perhaps," she laughed. "One thousand pounds! But it is a fortune!"

"Yes, but where did it come from?" I asked. "No one that I know of owes me a thousand pounds."

"Never mind where it comes from," Julie protested. "Where is it going to? What are you going to do with it? There are many ways," she went on, looking at me with an ingenuous smile, "in which a young man, already wealthy, might spend generously an offering like that which has dropped from the skies. In my opinion, the deserving poor of to-day are to be found amongst the class of young women whose fathers' ideas of a dress allowance are a little cramped, and whose one ambition in life is always to give pleasure to the young men who take them out."

Louis held out his glass for replenishment. He was looking more than a little worried.

"One must remember," he said, "that thousand-pound notes do not drop from the sky like this without bringing a message. If I were you, Captain, I should pay that money into the bank and sit upon it. You will probably have to return it to its owner before long."

"I shan't part too easily," I remarked, following Louis' example. "Two can play at a game like this."

Julie's large eyes flashed at me in joyous expectation.

"To-night," she reminded me, "you have asked me to dine with you. Is it not so?"

"Rather!" I answered. "We are going to dine in the Grill Room, go on to the Ballet, and dance down in the Restaurant for an hour or so afterwards."

"Such happiness!" she murmured. "Tell me, my cavalier, what shall I wear?"

"White," I replied promptly. "All colours become you, but you are ravishing in white."

"I have worn my white gown with you twice," she meditated. "It has brought

me no particular success."

"To-night," I told her, "I am in a susceptible frame of mind, and there is that thousand-pound note lying at the bank, consequently I am blessed with an extra-ordinary sense of opulence!"

"I shall be ready at a quarter to eight," she promised.

I turned and spoke to Louis for a moment a little more seriously.

"Have you ever known anything like this to happen before?" I asked.

"Never," he assured me.

"Is there any reasonable explanation which occurs to you?"

I fancied that there was the slightest possible hesitation about his manner. Nevertheless, his reply was decisive.

"None."

Julie was waiting for me in the lounge when I descended, and made a little curtsey in response to my glance of admiration.

"How I shall survive the evening I don't know," I confessed.

"I hope you won't," she answered. "I am tired of being an old maid."

We made our way into the Grill Room, exchanged a word with Louis, who I thought had a preoccupied air, and approached my table. It was laid for two, and in the napkin in front of my chair was a very beautiful dark crimson carnation.

"*Tiens!*" Julie exclaimed. "The money ceases and flowers arrive. Look quickly, Charles. There is perhaps a *billet-doux* with it."

There was no *billet-doux* there, nor any written message; but wrapped around the stem of the carnation was another crumpled but obviously veritable thousand-pound note! I must confess that I felt a little helpless. The second anonymous thousand-pound note within twenty-four hours! I turned towards my companion. She seemed dazed, but was promptly helpful.

"What do we do now?" I asked her.

"We break our rule and order a second cocktail while we consider the matter," she suggested.

I obeyed, and the cocktails duly arrived.

"And now?"

She folded the note carefully in four.

"You place that in your pocket-book," she directed. "And lean over, please."

She picked up the carnation and arranged it carefully in my buttonhole. We toy-

ed with our cocktails whilst we waited for our first course. Julie lit a cigarette.

"The next step, please?" I inquired. "No banks open, you know."

"We drink these cocktails to the welfare of your heavenly benefactor," she declared, "and after that we ask the advice of my wise parent. Until then, we do not speak again of these miracles."

"Excellent," I agreed. . . .

As soon as we had finished our meal and I had signed the bill, we made our way towards Louis' desk. I noticed that all the time during our approach his eyes were fixed upon the carnation in my buttonhole. It may have been my fancy, but he certainly seemed to me to be looking more than ever disturbed.

"You found that in your place?" he asked, indicating my adornment.

"I did," I answered, "and there was not a single one of the waiters who either put it there himself, or saw anyone else do it. And with the carnation—" I tapped my pocketbook.

"Another note?"

"Another note."

He drew himself up and, with the help of his stick, descended.

"We are not very busy tonight," he said. "José, keep an eye upon the door. I shall be in the flat."

We followed him there. I had been so engrossed in my own affairs during the last few days that I had scarcely given a thought to anyone else, and I was shocked, as he sank into his easy-chair, to see the dark rings under his eyes and the even more striking pallor of his face, and its finely cut features. He seemed, if such a thing were possible, to have grown thinner during the last twenty-four hours.

"Another thousand-pound note," he muttered, looking up at me, and I could see the veins on the backs of those delicate hands of his standing out as he gripped the arms of the chair. "And the carnation."

Julie, regardless of her toilette, suddenly dropped on her knees by the side of his chair, her left arm embraced him, with her right hand she caressed his cheek.

"*Mon pere,*" she whispered, "you are distressed! You know something. You suspect something. Is there a disaster behind these strange happenings? If there is, Charles will face it bravely. You distress yourself too much, *mon pauvre!*"

He smiled at her tenderly. Her words apparently gave him courage.

"It is true." he admitted. "The whole affair has revived an ancient fear. Perhaps I take it too seriously."

"Nothing to be alarmed about, anyhow, that I can see, Louis," I said reassuringly. "If this is the beginning of a conspiracy, what can anyone hope to gain by it?"

"It is a strange way of doing things," he reflected. "In this world, though, there are many strange people."

"Too mild a word," I insisted. "Lunatics! No sane person would play such tricks."

Louis looked up at me suddenly. There was something of the prophet in his still, set face and firm voice.

"It is no lunatic who is dealing with you, Captain Lyson," he assured me.

"Then you have an idea who it is?" I rejoined swiftly.

"I suspect," he admitted. "But even then I could give you no coherent explanation. When I think that it is good for you to know the little that I surmise, I shall tell it to you. Meanwhile," he concluded, rising once more to his feet, "I must go back to my place, and you must be off to your Ballet."

He waved us away.

"Upon your return from Covent Garden, please come to me," he begged. "If I am not at my desk, I shall be here."

We promised, and went on our way light-heartedly. I could find no tragedy in these strange happenings, and Julie was looking adorable. It was not until the curtain went down on the first part of the programme, and Julie and I were promenading amongst the crowd of notabilities in the foyer, that it suddenly occurred to me that I might be entering upon the next chapter of my fantastic adventure.

Strolling amongst the others was a tall, slim man of distinguished and unusual appearance. He walked in a fashion of his own, with his hands behind his back. His face—he was clean-shaven, with excellent features—was a little worn and more than a little lined. His height enabled him to look over the heads of most of the crowd, but now and then he returned a greeting and vouch-safed a smile. In the lapel of his dress coat he was wearing a carnation of exactly the same unusual dark crimson as my own! Julie, whose fingers rested, after the fashion of the foreigner, upon my arm,

suddenly tightened her grip.

"Charles," she asked me softly, "who is that?"

I shook my head.

"I seem to have seen him before," I admitted, "but I can't remember where."

"You noticed his carnation —yes? It is exactly like yours. There is not another one in the place."

"I noticed that," I confessed, "and I notice something else at the present moment," I added. "I believe the curtain is going up on our comedy drama. The stranger is about to speak to us."

I was right. With a courteous bow, the latter paused in front of us. He addressed us as though we were old acquaintances. His voice was pleasant, but his speech slow. There was just the suggestion of a foreign accent.

"A very beautiful performance," he remarked. "Matveich to-night is at his best. A genius, and at his best. We are fortunate."

"It is the first time I have ever been in the audience when he has conducted his own music," Julie confided.

"Well, I congratulate you," our new friend said. "The dancing—well, he has chosen perfect marionettes, but their interpretation is so graceful that one can forgive. So you, Captain Lyson, I am glad to see," he went on, turning to me, "are wearing the insignia of your new order."

"In complete ignorance, if I may say so, as to its significance," I ventured.

"You are curious?"

"Isn't it reasonable that I should be? Naturally I want to understand the meaning of these mysterious gifts."

"And I," Julie interposed, "being a woman, and possessed of even greater curiosity, would like to know your name, sir, and why Captain Lyson has been tormented in this strange manner?"

"Tormented is, I trust, too cruel a word," our friend objected. "I may have piqued his curiosity a little. It was necessary to excite his interest."

"And your name, please?" Julie persisted.

"That is a very simple affair," he replied. "My name is Alexander."

"Alexander," she repeated. "Alexander what?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Who is there of us who would be willing to disclose at a moment's notice all the dear secrets of his life, even to so charming a young lady as Louis' daughter? I have been called Prince Alexander, I have been called General Alexander, I have been called plain Mr. Alexander. You can

take your choice. Any one of them would be more or less correct."

"And the thousand-pound notes?" I asked.

"They constitute your entrance fee and your first year's subscription to the most exclusive club in the world," he confided. "It is a club, too, which has exceptional conditions. For instance, in most institutions of the sort the member pays his entrance fee and pays his subscription. In the case of the club of which you have been elected a member, the club pays you."

I was assailed with a sudden sentiment of mild irritation.

"I am elected a member of a club, then, without knowing even its name, and it pays two thousand pounds for the privilege of my membership?" I asked incredulously.

"Neatly put," was the faintly ironic rejoinder. "Spend the money if you like. It is yours. In the meantime, you will be asked to present yourself at headquarters within a few hours. A slight formality. Nothing that need disconcert you."

"But supposing I don't wish——"

"Ah, we will not suppose anything like that," our new acquaintance interrupted, showing signs of departure. "If you have any doubts, ask my esteemed friend and I gather yours—Louis. *Au revoir, Mademoiselle.* My compliments, the compliments of Alexander to your father. And to you, sir—*a bientot!*"

A Cabinet Minister was waiting for him a yard or two away. They walked up the broad stairs together. Julie caught once more at my arm.

"But this," she exclaimed, "I adore! And where in this world before have I seen a man so chic, with such a delightful presence? Alexander! Charles—tell me what uncrowned monarchs are wandering about the world?"

A ray of hope suddenly presented itself.

"Come along," I suggested, hurrying towards the doorway which led to our places. "We have your father to fall back upon. Hurry, Julie!" I went on as a ripple of applause around us quickly deepened into a roar. "Matveich is taking his place."

That night an extraordinary thing happened. Louis, my old friend Louis, showed distinct signs of wishing to avoid me. He left his desk as

we arrived from Covent Garden and before I could intercept him, he had entered his flat. When we returned from dancing in the Restaurant below, although there were still people supping in the Grill Room, Louis had deserted his post. Julie was herself distressed.

"What can be the matter with *mon pere* to-night?" she exclaimed.

I hesitated. She read my thoughts easily.

"You must come in with me, of course," she continued. "We will ask what he means by hiding from us."

We entered the flat. Louis was not in the tiny reception-room. He was not in his study. Julie passed through into his bedroom, closing the door after her. I waited for a few moments, then, as neither of them appeared, I went back into the little reception-room and mixed myself a whisky and soda. I was so much a friend of the house that I kept a pipe in Louis' rack by the side of the fireplace. I helped myself to some tobacco and settled myself in an easy-chair. It was at least a quarter of an hour before Julie reappeared, during which time the telephonebell had been ringing all the time in the bedroom. When she came, she seemed a little flushed, and I fancied that she had been engaged in some sort of dispute.

"Papa will come immediately," she announced.

"He is all right, I hope?" I asked.

"I think so," she replied. "He has been searching for some papers. He is expecting an important visitor."

"Had I better go?"

She shook her head.

"It is your affair, I think. Since you are here, he wishes you to remain."

"I would like to stop," I admitted frankly.

"Because you hate to leave me?" she asked, with one of her provocative gestures.

"Chiefly," I replied. "There is also another reason. I could not sleep a wink unless I had at least a glimmering of an idea as to what all this is about."

Then Louis made his appearance and I was relieved to see that he was altogether a changed man. He established himself in his favourite chair and Julie hastened to mix his usual nightly beverage—a concoction of lime-juice, tonic water, and gin. He glanced at his watch and then at the clock.

"I have ten minutes for explanations," he began. "I think, Captain," he went on, "that I can explain a good

deal of what must seem very mysterious to you."

"Go ahead," I begged. "I'm all for it."

"To-night you met the personage whom I will call Alexander, at the Ballet, I understand?"

"That is true," I replied. "He came and spoke to us. He spoke of my having joined some club or another."

"You need not take that too seriously," Louis assured me. "Things have changed during the last few hours. As to Alexander, I think I am one of the few people in Europe who really know who he is. He is one of the great ones of the past world. He was Chief of Staff to the Grand Duke Michael and, notwithstanding the fact that he was a very young man then, he was practically responsible for all the Russian victories against Austria. He is the one remaining aristocrat of the old regime who still possesses ideas, and courage to fight."

"What can he do in these days?"

"He can fight against the one power in the world which he loathes and detests, the power which has ruined and corrupted his country," Louis went on gravely. "Never mind where the money came from — he is enormously wealthy. The whole of his wealth and his great influence — great, although he keeps it all the time underground—is devoted to one purpose, to fighting anarchists and the whole doctrine of communism in its worst phases wherever it springs up. He has already advanced over two millions to help the Spanish rebels. He is the most hated and dreaded man living, amongst the Bolsheviks of Russia. I tell you now a serious thing. He holds his hand at nothing when he is fighting against the leaders of these people. There is one who has still maintained a European influence. That one, Alexander has sentenced to death. He needed the help of a brave man of adventurous spirit, and I think, Captain Lyson, that you were the person whom he was going to call to his assistance. Fortunately it has become unnecessary."

"I suppose you mean Trobenitzky," I asked.

"Heinrich Trobenitzky," Louis agreed. "Sometimes, however, the rats fight it out amongst themselves. The powers in Russia have become afraid of Trobenitzky. They have chased him out of his hiding-place. He had plans for going to France,

but those plans have not matured. He took a risk and landed here with a false passport. He was arrested tonight —Hearnshaw was here—in this place. I have just heard from Hearnshaw that bail was refused."

There was a soft knocking at the outer door and, without waiting for a reply, the man who had introduced himself to us in the foyer of the Opera House made his appearance. Louis, leaning heavily upon his stick, rose to his feet and greeted the newcomer with every mark of respect. He motioned me to wheel out an easy-chair.

"You will permit me for a moment, sir," he begged. "to offer a few words of explanation?"

It seemed to me that this strange visitor stiffened visibly. He was taller even than Louis and he looked at him as a prince might look at a courtier who had taken a liberty.

"Do I need explanations from you, Louis?" he asked.

"Circumstances have so decreed it, sir," was the respectful reply. "They have also delivered into your hands exactly what you desire—only through a different channel."

Louis paused. Alexander remained grimly and haughtily silent. Louis faced his task gallantly.

"Trobenitzky spends tonight, sir, in an English prison."

This time it was Louis who had scored. His listener, who was wearing a silk-lined cape over his evening clothes, threw it suddenly back as though short of breath. His cold eyes flashed. There was something splendid about his poise, something which seemed to suggest the eagle raising its head to scent the battle from afar.

"Trobenitzky!" he repeated. "In an English prison! Repeat that, Louis."

"It is true, sir," Louis assured him. "For reasons which you will understand better in a moment, I have spent the whole of the last few hours upon this affair. Trobenitzky fled in terror from the home which has sheltered him lately, dreading the arrival of assassins from Moscow. France is not ready for him. Germany will have nothing to do with him. He landed in England."

"Ah!" Alexander muttered —a long, drawn-out syllable.

"They had news of his coming," Louis proceeded. "Just now English statesmen are not looking for trouble of that sort. His passport was out of order. He was arrested to-night in my Grill Room

and taken to Bow Street. To some extent it was a technical matter, but it was sufficient. When I say that he is spending the night in an English prison, it is the truth. He may leave it tomorrow, but he will not step outside the cordon which the English police are drawing around him."

"If they knew what I know," Alexander said calmly, "he would hang."

"It is scarcely likely," Louis continued, "that he will leave this country alive. Still —will you hand this to our august visitor, Lyson?"

I took the narrow strip of paper and passed it to Alexander. It was an open cheque signed by Louis for two thousand pounds!

"I wish to point out to you in great respect and humility, sir," Louis went on, "these facts. Captain Lyson, although he has retired from active service, still holds a commission in the British Army. He has remained a member of our military Secret Service. He also has liaison connections of which we do not speak, with Scotland Yard. It would be the end of his career if he joined your society, sir. He loves adventure. He hates like poison that monster you hate, sir. But——"

Alexander held up his hand.

"I understand," he said.

He looked at the cheque and he glanced across at me.

"Is it true, Captain Lyson," he asked, "what Louis has just told me?"

"It is, sir," I admitted.

He tore the cheque in two.

"A pity," he sighed.

"Trobenitzky will be remanded to-morrow, of course," Louis explained. "He will be granted bail, but he will be under police surveillance for the whole of the time he is allowed to remain in England. His campaign in France is already brought to an end."

"And his life on this earth," Alexander said, "will soon follow.... In the midst of tragedy we blunder into comedy," he concluded, turning towards me with a smile. "Captain Lyson, you will do me the honour of joining my club as an honorary member, and I hope you will give me the pleasure of dining one night with mademoiselle."

"It will give me great pleasure, sir," I replied.

That was the end of it all. The finest-looking man I have ever seen took his leave with a slight comprehensive gesture of farewell. Julie and I dined with him in great splendour a few nights later

and the matter of the two thousand-pound notes became the subject of a friendly argument between our host and myself. The matter was decided whilst Julie was engaged in conversation at the next table with a very charming lady to whom we had been presented.

"An idea occurs to me, my friend," Alexander declared. "I will accept your offer to return those notes on one condition. It is this. I have noticed—you will excuse me—some signs of an affectionate understanding between you and the daughter of my old friend Louis?"

"We are great friends, certainly," I admitted.

"Very well," he went on, "One can never tell how these things go, of course, and I trust that nothing I say will seem to you in the least presumptuous, but if by any chance I should hear that 'a marriage has been arranged' between you two young people, you agree that this money which you have thrust back upon me shall be devoted to a wedding gift?"

Julie was returning to the table, so I had to make up my mind quickly.

"I agree. A princely gift it will be, if ever the occasion arises," I acknowledged in some embarrassment.

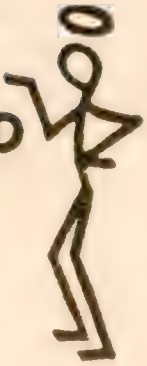
So those two thousand-pound notes were temporarily returned to the great anti-anarchist war chest of which Alexander holds the key. The dark carnation, however, which he had placed in her hand upon leaving the little flat a few nights before, Julie refused to part with.

A BOOTLEGGER'S PARADISE

Herman O. Bomar, Jr., chief enforcement officer for Tennesee's Alcoholic Beverage Commission, speaking at a conference of liquor control administrators in Washington this past spring, was quoted as saying that his office's problems with moonshiners were complicated by the reality that 87 of the 95 counties in the State are "dry".

"Last year", Bomar said, "we seized 822 stills, 356,000 gallons of mash, and made 876 arrests. It's a bootlegger's paradise. And besides that, our laws are a hodgepodge."

THE saint CROSSWORD



ACROSS

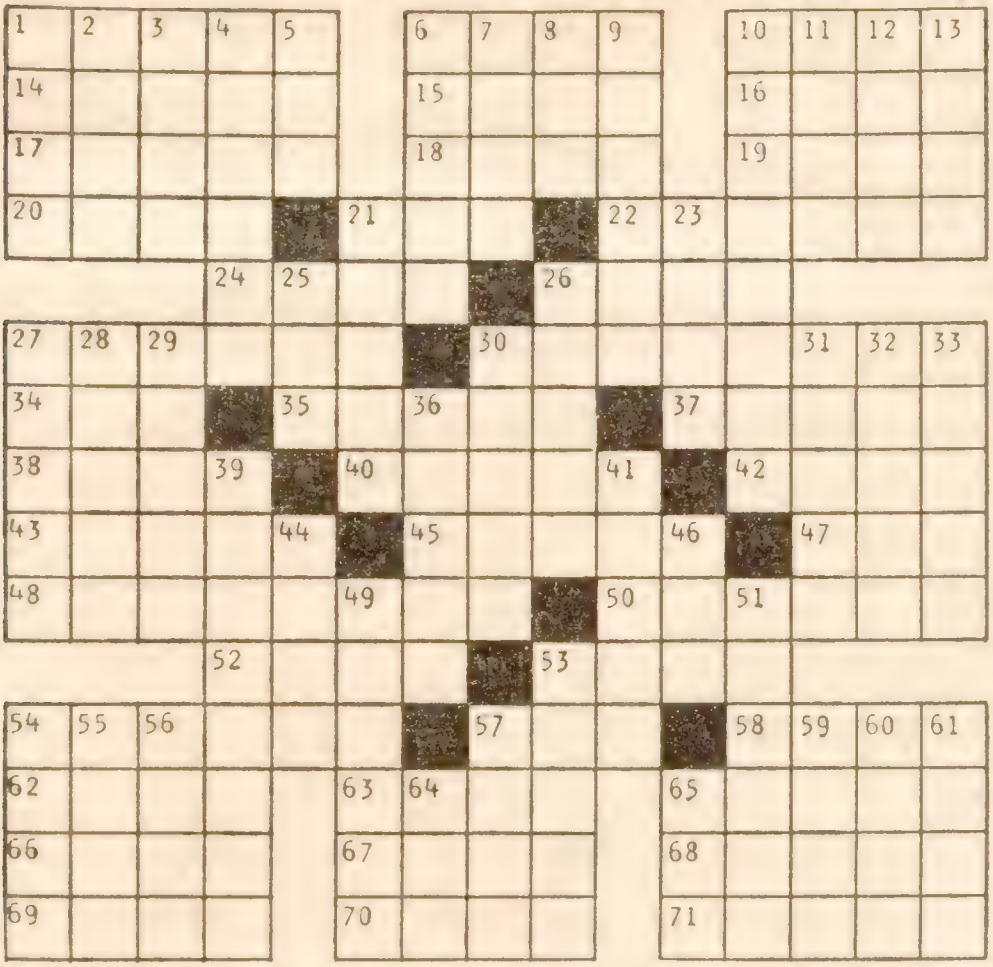
1. Fend it off
6. No way to spell if human
10. Hold forth
14. Lights sound hurt
15. Cloth confuses remedy
16. Potentate in mud back to front
17. Not always liquid
18. Finishes askirt*
19. Song without chorus
20. Ivan was terrible
21. Shakespeare wrote much
22. Obstructed
24. Shaped by divinity
26. Saint's victim, mixed up as usual
27. Reliably joined
30. Like old-time marriages
34. Valuable rocks
35. Dragging tail
37. Rude look
38. Old B-minus movie stars
40. Straighten soldier's line
42. Lady Macbeth wanted out with expletive
43. Does 10 across
45. Made of a cereal
47. End of a native of Vietnam
48. Shoes for stealing
50. Student with speech impediment goes gardening
52. Disturb
53. Tom's fun
54. Loyalty
57. How to call a man a flower and get away with it
58. Kind of examination
62. Mixed cargo
63. Old Sapanish coin
65. Scots bun
66. Highland low land
67. Optic shrinker
68. Vocal link
69. Norman blood
70. Put up
71. In Brooklyn, this flower would be a catastrophe

DOWN

1. A squabble on the ankle
2. News from Moscow
3. Nero' s handle
4. Blew another way
5. Half an inverted fly
6. Told by the devout
7. Sonar response
8. One of 51 in reverse
9. Count less feeling
10. Angles again
11. Mad Malay
12. Cockney tack through Egypt
13. Past footing
21. Supplemented
23. Overturned Italian hall
25. A growth on its bottom
26. Rendesvous only sad in France
27. Drinks in

funereal spelling
28. Great waters
29. Impudence
30. Measure space
31. Hung open
32. Flower behind a tub
33. Washes with a well-bred man
36. Only a U turn from dawn
39. From New Year's Eve to Eve
41. Attached with marriage
44. Flip bit
46. Topless joint
49. Town in Ohio
51. Notable periods
53. Heart throb
54. Queer British smokes
55. An ash in fairy-tale
56. British port unlike garden
57. Tease
59. Source of growth
60. Henry's fourth
61. Lecherous 37
64. Makes compass points adjectival
65. Baseless 1 down

(*This is NOT a typo)



(Turn to page 148 for solution)

NOTE:
If this month's clues seem to have some Shakespearean bias, that must be why he is getting to be known in certain circles as Whirling William. L.C.

the money changers

by Laurence M. Janifer

The trouble with being a cop in Southern California is that everybody thinks you're Sergeant Friday. I mean, you get a lot of this How's-your-Mom-Ed kind of backtalk from the characters on the streets, and if you're walking a beat it can get pretty bad after a while. Maybe the first time the stuff is even funny, but from about number ten on through number a million and a half it just gets progressively worse. So the first thing you do (all this, naturally, if you're a cop in Southern California, and if you're not you're lucky enough to need no further help) is to get off pounding a beat and find yourself another job.

The second thing you do is start finding a way back onto the beat.

Because Southern California is not like any other place, friend. If you get on the Homicide Detail there are all these caves and aban-

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Mr. Janifer tells us that "Southern California, all by itself, is hard to believe—but there it is. God created it, and who are you to argue." Those who are conditioned to the fauna, metaphysical and political, common to those parts, will no doubt challenge this statement. And in a way they will be right. The Big Johns of this world are not unique to those parts.

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doned mines around, where some guy could hide a body and if you were very very lucky you might find it in ten years if you had nothing else to do. If you sign up for the Police Lab you get analysis runs on more different kinds of studio makeup than you can imagine, plus fifteen thousand different kinds of grease from the plane factories.

And if you sign up for the Gambling Detail, friend, you get what I got.

Now, if you happen to live in Ashtabula or Cleveland or even Irkutsk you may find my painful little story hard to believe. In that case, all I can say is this: Southern California, all by itself, is hard to believe—but there it is. God created it, and who are you to argue?

God, by the way, comes into the story—in sort of an odd way. Tess says the story has nothing really to do with God, and I shouldn't talk this way, so maybe I ought to leave it up to you, to make up your own mind.

Tess is my girl. She says the word is "fiancee," but it seems a little bit fancy for two people who just happen to be engaged. Whichever one you like, she's it, and I was over at her place the night everything started. Tess can cook, and we were finishing up a shore-dinner kind of thing, and just beginning to feel nice and relaxed, when her phone rang.

I figured it was her mother, who lives in Idaho and calls up once a week to find out whether Tess has decided to give me up and marry a movie actor, but Tess listened for a couple of seconds and then handed the phone to me.

I said: "Brown speaking."

"Brownie?" Everybody calls me Brownie—except Tess, who calls me what's none of your business. But I knew the voice, which belonged to Captain Hennessey. "Listen, I'm sorry to cut into your time off, but you'd better get down here right away."

"Okay, Captain," I said. "What's happened?"

"It's Big John," he said. "I think we've got something a little special going on."

So I said okay again, and hung up, and explained things to Tess. She's an understanding type, as she'd better be if she plans to marry a cop, because you never know. Especially in Southern California, you never know.

I left her standing in the doorway, looking just as cute and blonde as anything you

ever dreamed about, and I headed downtown in my car, toward headquarters. Headquarters was six blocks away, but I took the car: in Southern California nobody walks. The only way cops get flat feet is pushing down on the gas pedal.

On the way I thought about Tess, but what the hell, business is business. And a cop has to preserve law and order, and protect people, and all that stuff.

By the time I hit Captain Hennessey's office I almost felt like a hero. It took Captain Hennessey nearly three minutes to kill that feeling, which is a long time as these things go.

Maybe what I'd better do here is fill you in a little on Big John, because you might not know this character as well as the Gambling Detail did. First of all, the name.

Now, criminals generally do not have names like this, in spite of all the stories. They have names like ordinary people, though maybe they change them a little more often; but Big John liked to be fancy. I think it was the song that got popular a little while back that put the idea in his head in the first place, because his original name wasn't even John, and he wasn't especially big. According to the file we had on him, he had been born Grover Leslie Paffendrodt, and he was five feet nine and a half inches tall. But now he was a gambler, and lots of people who had never heard of Grover Leslie Paffendrodt knew Big John. He'd even changed his height, with these elevator shoes, so he looked about five-eleven.

He had a list of arrests as long as your arm, but somehow we had never got a conviction on him, and he'd become sort of a challenge. I mean, there was always something—like the time we'd found him running a poker game, and he'd managed to prove that a local university professor, who'd been one of the players, had been running the thing as an experiment in mathematical probability.

Or the time we'd busted up a dice game which, he convinced a jury, had been a series of tests involving telekinesis and extra-sensory perception.

So, with Big John, it *had* to be something special. He'd been quiet for a couple of months, and I wasn't really surprised that he'd come up with a new idea: it seemed about time.

Captain Hennessey didn't

go into many details. "Brownie," he said when I'd closed the office door behind me, and saluted, and then sat down on the other side of the desk—I mean, we keep up the forms, and everything, but you get to be friendly after a while—"Brownie, we've received word that Big John opened up a gambling palace over on South Marengo Street."

"A gambling palace?" I asked, because that seemed like sort of a big idea, even for Big John.

"The complete job," Captain Hennessey said. His white hair looked a little mussed. as if he'd been through a little trouble, but his expression was just as stern as ever. "Roulette wheels, poker-dice, twenty-one, the works. From the picture we get, it looks like Las Vegas over there."

I nodded. Captain Hennessey took out a couple of cigars and offered one to me. I don't smoke, but I appreciated the friendliness. "Is there any chance he can call this one some kind of university experiment?" I asked.

"Not a chance," he said. "There's just too much of it. Not even a jury would believe he was doing anything but gambling."

"Well," I said, feeling cheerful, "it looks like we've got him at last."

Captain Hennessey shrugged. "Maybe," he said. "But you've got to be cautious around Big John."

"Oh, sure," I said. "What's our first move?"

"I want you to go over there," he told me.

"Me? Alone?" I was thinking of bringing a squad car or two, busting in and breaking the place up all in one fell swoop, but apparently the Captain had other ideas.

"You alone," he said. "Out of uniform. I just want you to get a look at the lay of the land, sort of size up the situation, and then come back and report."

"Out of uniform?"

He shrugged again, lit his cigar and blew some smoke at me. "We don't want Big John to know we've got our eye on him," he said.

"Now, wait a minute, Captain," I said. "If he's running a gambling palace over there he can't really believe he's keeping it quiet. And, besides, he knows me — Big John knows every cop on the detail, maybe every cop on the force. Being out of uniform isn't going to make any difference."

"We've got to try," he said grimly. "Maybe he won't recognize you. Try and look

like somebody else. Maybe get some disguises or something." He paused, and that old look of command came over his face. "We're going to play this one by the book, Brownie," he said. "This time, Big John isn't going to slip out of our clutches."

Well, he was the Captain, and I didn't feel like arguing. I stood up and saluted, and when I got to the door one more question occurred to me. "Captain Hennessey, why did you send for me? I mean me in particular, instead of one of the men on duty?"

"I tried the men on duty first," he said.

"And?"

"They refused," he told me. "One after another, they refused. Point blank. I had to bust them down to pounding beats again — terrible, I know, but when you're faced with outright insubordination—"

"I understand, Sir," I said, and I went out.

It didn't occur to me until later—until too late, in fact—that the others might have had some good reason for refusing.

For instance, Captain Hennessey might have told them something more about Big John's new operation—something he just hadn't bothered to tell me.

Like the sign over Big John's wide-open front door.

The address on South Marengo Street—Captain Hennessey's secretary gave it to me before I went out—was easy enough to find, though it was about forty blocks away, and that made things a little tough. I didn't want to take a squad car, because I was supposed to be out of uniform, and I wasn't sure I could find a place far enough away from Big John's to park, so I walked. It was a hot night, so I didn't bother with disguises, because I couldn't think of one that would be any real good, anyhow: I just concentrated on looking as civilian and different as I could.

The place was well-lighted, and there was a fair amount of noise coming out. It was about ten-thirty at night, but even though Big John had set up in a residential district nobody was complaining about the noise. A lot of people like to gamble—just one more thing to make the job of the Gambling Detail a little harder.

And the sign was clear enough—a big hand-lettered job in heavy cardboard, red lettering on a white ground, stuck up plain as day over

the front door.

BIG JOHN'S REDISTRIBUTION CHAPEL

It was right then, when I saw the sign, that I first began to get the idea there might be some trouble.

But it didn't mean too much to me, not right away. I started inside, and as soon as I got past that front door a big bruiser was standing next to me. He had a suit and tie on, but that wasn't enough of a disguise. I knew him as a hanger-on of Big John's, a character named Feodor.

He knew me, too.

"Hi, there, Brownie," he said in his big bass growl. "Come to enjoy the services?"

"I'm not Brownie," I said.

"Well, then, you're his twin brother." That passed for wit as far as Feodor was concerned: he laughed it up for a second and then he said: "Anyhow, whoever you are, you're welcome at the services."

Ahead of me there was another door, and behind that I could hear the noise of a big-time gambling joint, the mutter of talk, the rattle of dice and the whir of the wheel, the flip of cards. "What are you talking about?" I said. "What services?"

"Big John's Redistribution Chapel," he said. "Continuous services so long as the chips hold out."

"You mean gambling," I said.

Feodor tried to look innocent, which wasn't easy for Feodor. "Gambling?" he said. "Us?"

"What's that I hear, then?" I asked him. "You'd better let me pass."

"Who's stopping you?" he said. "At Big John's Chapel, everybody is welcome. Even cops. Big John himself says so."

That made me even more nervous. But I went on by and pushed open the second door. The place was lit up like New Year's Eve, a big room full of smoke. Every kind of gambling you've ever heard of was there: dice, roulette, poker and poker-dice, twenty-one and gambling solitaire, chuck-a-luck—and everything was getting a big play. The only thing was, the language was a little different.

I'll give you some samples.

At the roulette wheel: "Okay, ladies and gents, we're ready to spin again—place your devotions and let's go."

At the dice layout: "I'll take some of that six-to-five—Brother Henry can't stay blessed forever."

At the poker table: "I'll stand pat. I feel holy tonight."

Frankly, friend, I wasn't at all sure what the hell was going on. . .

After a few seconds of wandering this way and that and getting pushed around by a lot of eager gamblers, I spotted Big John himself, over in a corner discussing some details with one of his dealers. I headed over toward him, and he saw me from about ten feet away and waved just as cheerily as you please.

I didn't wave back. When I got to him I said, straight off: "This time, Big John, you've gone too far. We'll have you closed down before you can say uncle."

"Closed down?" he said. "On what grounds?"

"Even if you get rid of everything by the time we get a squad over here," I said, "my evidence will stand up in court. I've seen everything."

Big John nodded. The dealer said: "Kind of a nice layout, isn't it, Brownie?"

"Okay, Jerry," Big John said. "Get back to your table. And remember—Mrs. Remora is one of our oldest parishoners. She's good for a check any time."

"Sure," the dealer said, and went off through the crowd. Big John turned to me.

"Now," he said, "just how are you going to close me down?"

"How?" I said. "I'll show you how."

"You mean you'll get a squad over here and lock the place up?" he asked. Just then another one of his helpers came by and beckoned to him.

"Big John, I think Brother Sanford's had a little too much of our sacramental imbibing," he said in a hurry. "He's sort of loud, and he's disturbing the play."

Big John nodded. "Okay, get some boys to take him to the contemplation room until he sleeps it off. He's good for another five thousand or so in devotions, once he wakes up."

"Right," the dealer said, and disappeared.

"Now, look—" I began.

Big John cut me off with a wave of his hand. "You look," he told me. "Before you go and get your squad, you go out and take a good look at my sign. I don't want you boys biting off more than you can chew."

"Very friendly of you," I said sarcastically.

He just shrugged it off. An irritating character. "Why should I cause trouble?" he

said, and then added: "I've got to go and take care of some things, Brownie. Stick around and join the play, if you feel like it."

He was gone before I could think of anything to say. But I had the whole picture now. I went out steaming mad.

I did take another look at that big sign over the front door—but no fancy sign was going to stop me.

What did Big John think he was pulling, anyhow?

The way I saw it, there was no need to bother Captain Hennessey with the details. Besides, this was the time we were going to get Big John once and for all, and I liked the idea of having the whole capture appear on my records. So I rounded up the boys from Headquarters—mostly patrolmen, since the Detail didn't seem to be around, having been demoted and all—and this time we didn't walk.

We loaded into three squad cars and we went back to South Marengo Street with all sirens live. We pulled up in front of the joint and for a couple of minutes it really felt like *Dragnet*, dum-da-dum-dum and everything. We piled out and went past Feodor blowing our whistles, and a couple of guys screamed: "It's a raid! It's a raid!" and I could see Big John waving his hands over his head over near the roulette layout and saying:

"Just be calm, everybody! Just be calm!"

But nobody was paying much attention, and customers were slipping out the back and diving out windows and generally trying to escape. We scattered and began to round up the dealers, and the evidence—cards, chips, dice—two guys even latched onto the wheel and got it back by shoving it in the trunk of the squad car—and, of course, Big John himself.

He came along quietly, which I thought showed good sense. In fact, the whole operation went off smoothly, comparatively speaking. It was almost a model raid, just like in the text books, and I was sort of proud of it. I thought of my picture in the papers the next day, and I thought of how pleased Tess would be.

Why, there might even be a promotion in it for me, I told myself.

We got everybody back to the station house just as nicely as you please, and Captain Hennessey came downstairs just as we were booking the last two or three guys.

"Brownie!" he screamed.

"What do you think you're doing?"

I looked around and saluted. It's nice to keep up the formalities. "It's all over, Captain," I said. "We're just booking the last of them."

"The last of *who?*" he shouted. The guys waiting to be booked were looking up sort of hopefully, but I signalled my men to go right on.

"The last of the gamblers, naturally," I said. "From Big John's joint."

"You—" He looked like he was having trouble talking. "You raided Big John's gambling palace?" he managed to get out at last. He was turning sort of purple, and I began to wonder what was wrong.

I even thought for a second that Captain Hennessey was being bribed by Big John to keep the place open. But that was impossible. "I saw it all," I said. "We got all the evidence—we even got Big John, and a roulette wheel. Everything's finished."

"It certainly is," he said, in a kind of tired voice. He looked around. The last guys had been led back to cells, and only me and my men were standing around. "Brownie," the Captain said, "I want to talk to you. Privately."

"Sure, Captain," I said. I dismissed my men and they went back to the rec rooms, and Captain Hennessey and I went upstairs. Maybe, I thought, he's mad because now I'll get the medals instead of him.

But somehow it didn't look that way.

He sat down behind his desk. I saluted and sat down opposite him, and waited. A long second went by.

"Brownie," he said, "did you, by any chance, see a sign over Big John's front door?"

"Oh, that," I said. "Sure I saw it. But it takes more than a silly sign to stop the Gambling Detail."

He closed his eyes, like he was in pain or something. "Brownie," he said, "what did the sign say?"

"It said Big John's Redistribution Chapel," I told him. "Like he was trying to make out the place was a church. But all it took was one look inside to tell me different, Captain. I mean, I'm on the Gambling Detail. I know what gambling looks like."

Captain Hennessey looked like the pain was gaining on him. "Sure you do," he said. "And do you know what a church looks like?"

"Sure," I said. "Pews, and candles, and stained glass, and—"

"Unfortunately," he said, "you're wrong."

I blinked. "I'm wrong?"

"Big John," he said, very slowly, "was running a church. You, Brownie, have raided a temple—for all I know, a Cathedral."

"That place?" I said. "Don't be silly, Captain; there wasn't even a gargoyle on it. Or anything."

"Never mind," he said. "The damage is done, and it's too late." He paused, and then he added: "On your way out, Brownie, ask my secretary to call the DA's office and get me some lawyers."

"Sure, sir," I said. "Which ones?"

"Any lawyers," he said. "As many as possible. At least six—maybe ten would be better."

"Right," I said. "Anything else I can do?"

"Go home, Brownie," he said. "Go home—and try to forget."

I said: "But—" and he opened his eyes, and he looked at me. So I went out. He had kind of a funny look, and it made me feel he was right, and I'd better go home.

The next two or three days, nothing special happened. Oh, I saw Tess and we were getting along fine, being engaged and everything, but I mean at work. Everything was sort of routine, and I had the feeling everybody was waiting for something to happen.

On the third night, it happened.

When I got to Captain Hennessey's office I saw it was sort of crowded. But he'd sent for me, so I went on in. There were about a dozen guys there, all in dark business suits, and carrying these attachê cases. The cases really snarled things up, because no matter where you moved you were tripping over one.

I managed to clear my way to the desk and salute. "Sergeant Brown reporting, Sir," I said, and one of the strangers said:

"Is this him?"

"Yep," Captain Hennessey said. "This is Brownie."

The stranger pushed his way over to me, and the rest of the men formed sort of a circle around the three of us, me and this one man and the Captain. It was almost like the setup they make when you get a medal, but it didn't feel the same.

"Brownie — Sergeant Brown—" the man started.

"Call me Brownie," I said. "Everybody does."

He nodded. "Brownie, then," he said. "I'd like to ask you a few questions about your—ah—your actions the other night."

I told him to go ahead.

"You went into this—ah—chapel with your men, correct?" he said.

"That's right."

"Were you invited in? Did anyone tell you to enter?"

"Well," I said, "there really wasn't time. See, we were sort of rushing in, to get there before they destroyed the evidence—"

"I see," he said. "And you arrested this—ah—Big John, together with many of his aides?"

"We booked them, that's right," I said.

"On what charges?"

"Violation of gambling statutes," I said. "It's all downstairs on the blotter."

The man nodded, sort of sadly. "Ah, yes," he said. "I was afraid it would be."

Captain Hennessey leaned across his desk. "Well?" he asked.

The man shook his head. "There isn't a chance," he said. "We can't let the case come to trial."

I stared. "Now, wait a minute," I said. "I don't care what Big John calls his place, or anything else. That was gambling going on in there, and the Gambling Detail is supposed to stop gambling."

"Not in a church," the man said, looking unhappy. "Brownie, I guess I'd better explain things to you."

"Okay," I said. "Go ahead."

Everybody stood around looking sort of bored while he took a breath and started to explain. "Brownie, in this country we have freedom of religion. That means that any church can have just about any form of worship it wants."

"But—" I started.

"Any church can set up any ritual it likes, and call it worship, and even collect money—like alms, for instance—and the law is powerless to interfere. It's even tax-exempt."

"But Big John hasn't got a church there," I said.

The man shook his head. "He does if he says he does," he told me. "Big John, as you call him, is an ordained minister—from some 'school' that gives out diplomas for fifty dollars, but that makes no difference to the law. This is his church—and it's all perfectly legal. By breaking in and making arrests, you've made the police liable to court charges, if Big John decides

to press them."

I tried to let all that sink in. "You mean he can do anything—anything, so long as he calls it a church?"

"That's just about right," the man said.

There was a long silence.

"Well, I'll be damned," I said at last.

"I'm sure that, according to Big John's church, you will be," he told me.

Another minute went by. Then I got my idea. "There's only one thing to do," I said.

"Resign in a body," Captain Hennessey said.

"No," I told him. "No. I mean—well, look. If Big John says this is a church, there's nothing we can do, right?"

"Right," the Captain said.

"So we have to make him say it's not a church," I went on. "We have to ask him about the place, mix him up, get him to admit the whole church idea is just a front for his gambling house. "

"You mean question him?"

"Sure," I said. "After all, what kind of a church has gambling going on? I mean not like Bingo or something, but right in with the services?"

"Gambling," the man said, "*is* the service."

"There," I said. "See? It's such a silly idea, even Big John can't work up enough reasons for it to stick to this church talk for long."

Captain Hennessey looked at the men. The men looked back. Finally the one who had talked to me spoke up.

"It's a slim chance," he said, "but we might as well try it."

And with that, we headed downstairs to where the cells were. I led the way, of course.

I still thought I could take care of Big John once and for all.

Six hours later, I was beginning to lose hope. Big John, though, looked just fine. The men and Captain Hennessey were all crowded outside, and I sat on the bunk in the cell with Big John. I felt a little tired and a little hoarse.

"Now, let's go over it once more," I said. "This church of yours believes in redistributing money, is that right?"

"That's right," Big John said. "I seen the light, and I got religion. So I thought about my beliefs for a while, and I realized how silly it was for some people to have lots of money while other people didn't have so much. So I decided my church would redistribute this money."

"By gambling?" I said.

"That gives everybody an

equal chance. The way my church thinks, if everybody has an equal chance, then things are clear for the right to win and the wrong to lose. We just sort of set things up for that to happen."

"And your parishioners—"

"We're open to anybody," Big John said. He didn't seem hoarse at all. He seemed to be having a fine time. "Anybody with real belief," he said, "who's willing to lay it on the line."

"Okay," I said. "Then how about the house cut?"

"Expenses of running the church," he said.

"Without a profit?"

"Our books," he told me, "are private. We got the right."

They did. One of the men had agreed to that, some hours before, the first time it had come up.

"Well—" I started.

One of the men outside broke in. "It's hopeless," he said. "We might as well give up."

I looked around, and Captain Hennessey was beckoning to me. I let myself out. Big John just sat on his bunk, not even trying to escape. He looked sort of comfortable there.

"He's certainly thought everything out," I told the Captain.

"We'll have to let him go," he said.

I looked back in the cell. It seemed a shame—but I couldn't think of any more ideas. "How about *his* charges?" I said.

"Oh, he won't press charges," Captain Hennessey said. "He doesn't want a court fight any more than we do: why should he? He's got what he wants."

"Oh, Captain!" Big John was getting up and coming to the bars at the front of the cell. Captain Hennessey turned around to look at him, his face sort of grim and tired.

"Yes?" he said.

"I just thought you'd like to know," Big John said. "I'm disbanding my church."

Captain Hennessey stared. "You're *what?*"

"Frankly," Big John said, "it's getting to be too much trouble. I mean, there are so many people who don't understand what religion means to a man like me—"

"You're— disbanding—" Captain Hennessey started.

"You can forget all about Big John's Redistribution Chapel," he said. "As soon as you let me out, I'll make it official."

Frankly, I was suspicious. And so was Tess: as a mat-

ter of fact, she gave me the idea. "That man," she said, "is up to no good."

And, you know, friend, I was pretty sure she was right.

But I didn't figure on what's happened now.

There's a new organization in town. It's rented a small storefront, and there's a big sign out in front.

BIG JOHN'S RELIGIOUS ANIMAL REVERENCE SYNOD

It's got branches all over town—and the talk is they'll be branching out all over the country soon.

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"to sleep so soundly"

by Tiffany Holmes

George Campbell managed to straighten his tie with his right hand while holding with his left a large brown bag of groceries. At the same time, he knocked on the door with his foot.

"Who's there?" shouted a voice from inside.

"Me."

"It's open. Come in."

He let himself into the apartment. The living room lights were all out. There was only the red light in the kitchen to guide him.

He emptied the grocery bag and poured the contents of one of the containers into two bowls.

"How many times do I have to tell you to keep the door bolted? There's no telling what trouble you may be inviting if you don't," he said as he rummaged for a pair of spoons.

"I had a hunch *you* would be coming along about now. Would you say *that* was trouble?" said the voice.

Tiffany Holmes returns with still another story about George Campbell and his young wife. Warren Quate, the Shakespearean scholar and a professor at Wickerley, had been murdered. Campbell had been called in unofficially, and his wife was to take over Quate's classes....

"That depends on you. Where *are* you, sweetheart?"

"In the bedroom. Wait where you are. I'll be with you in a couple of minutes."

She spoke too late. He had already come through the bedroom door carrying a tray with two spoons and bowls on it.

"What have you...?"

"Won-ton soup. I thought you were sick since you've been staying home these last few days, so I brought you energy-giving won-ton soup fresh from around the corner."

He looked at the figure on the bed and laughed. She was wearing white silk Chinese pajamas which looked dazzling with her dark coloring. There was a portable typewriter on her lap. How could she type on a machine which was settled so precariously there?

"Thanks. Let me clear some of these things away so you can put the tray down on the table."

"No. No, let me. You stay where you are."

She looked at him, puzzled. He handed her a bowl and a spoon.

"Eat. When you finish this I'll bring in the chow mein. Tell me, have you seen a doctor?"

"I'm fine! Really I am! There's nothing to see a doctor *about*."

"Please, Kate. Don't fool around with your health."

"I got a clean bill of health a couple of months ago. What's on your mind?"

"Two months ago! That was before we... Say, would you have stayed home for nearly a week if you were *really* fine?"

"I *told* you I have a lot of books to review this week and not enough time to read them."

"I *still* think there's more to it!"

She finished her soup in silence and looked hard at him. "George, I've never seen you like this before. You sound as though you..."

"Of course," he interrupted. "I'll get the chow mein." He cleared away the soup bowls and retreated to the kitchen.

Kate typed a few more words until the chow mein came, but her mind was not on it. He came in with the tray again and set it down on the desk, at the same time putting aside the vase with the still-fresh bridal bouquet.

"Aren't you uncomfortable with that machine on you? Here, let me move it for you."

"Thank you. George, I really am okay. Nothing un-

usual. Please believe that."

He sat down beside her on the bed for the chow mein course.

"Want some noodles, sweetheart?"

She stared at him. "Okay, George, what is it you want?"

"How do you like this dame?!" he said to the covered cage of the myna bird. "I come bearing the best Chinese food in New York City and *she* thinks I have an ulterior motive!"

"What is it you want, George?" she repeated calmly.

"What makes you think I want something?"

"First of all, the Chinese food—you never brought me that before. Second: sweetheart."

"Huh?"

"You called me sweetheart twice tonight."

"So?"

"You never call me that unless you want something. Let me see: there was 'sweetheart, get me an icebag.' That was last Christmas. 'Sweetheart, shut up,' and oh yes! When Peggy threw her bouquet at me, there was 'Sweetheart, throw it back. Tonight you called me sweetheart twice in less than twenty minutes."

"Okay, okay!"

"What is it you want?"

"First. . ."

"You mean you want *more* than one thing?!"

"First, when I tell you what I have in mind, you're supposed to look up at me—adoringly, I hope—and say 'Yes, Chief.'"

"No, Chief. That went out with Perry Mason movies."

"Don't say no till you hear what I have to say."

"I won't say yes till I know what I'm saying yes *to*."

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"Will you stop beating around the bush and tell me what's on your mind?"

He spoke quickly—to get it over with.

"I got you a job."

A chunk of her chow mein went down the wrong pipe and she began to choke. He hit her hard between the shoulder blades, which restored her powers of breathing and speech, but upset the half-empty plate which had been on his lap. Before he could stop her, she was busy rolling up the damaged scatter rug in angry silence.

"Kate?" He tried to get her to meet his gaze.

She broke away from him and dropped the rug into the bathroom hamper.

"Kate, say something. Say

*any*thing."

She cleared away the dishes, still avoiding him. When the kitchen door was between them, she wiped away the tears of fury which rolled down her cheeks, try as she would to remain in control of herself.

"What are you doing in there?"

She was washing her plastic dishes, using the hard scrubbing brush brutally to vent the anger Campbell had just provoked. From the bedroom he could hear the furious rush of water, the clatter of dishes, and the slamming of cupboard doors. If he could get her to speak to him—and he began to wonder if he really wanted to—he was in for a violent night of it.

"Are you through in there?" She was. She went into the dark living room, turned on the radio ("If Love Were All," then "A Fellow Needs A Girl" Ha!) and stopped fighting herself. When Campbell entered the living room, he found her on the sofa, indulging in a good cry. He reached for her, but she got up and moved to a chair. He dreaded these tearful scenes; they always made him feel as though he was being pulled through a wringer—several times. He handed her one of the pillows behind him on the sofa.

"Here. Throw this at me if it will make you feel any better."

She accepted it and threw it, hitting him squarely in the face. It gave her no satisfaction; nothing smashed.

"Don't you even want to know what kind of job it *is?*"

Then the torrent of words came. "You are unquestionably the most obnoxious, antagonizing, parasitic man I've ever known. Aren't you satisfied that I have *two* lucrative jobs and work with *you* at headquarters in the evenings? Why in the name of seven screwy gods do you want me to have another job? Do you have some diabolical scheme to live off me? What kind of masochistic moron do you take me for?"

It never failed. When she was furious she was just like all the other literate women he had ever known: polysyllabic.

"Well, at least you're speaking to me."

"Do you know what you are, George Campbell? I'd better not say it." She shut off the radio. "Tell me: just what kind of job did you get me?"

"You're a college professor."

Kate sat in silence for what seemed like several eternities. Suddenly, she looked at Campbell and spoke.

"Squeeze me."

"What?"

"I said squeeze me. I had a nightmare."

She would never in a million years be predictable, he thought. Never mind. He was willing to oblige then and there.

"Nightmare?" he said, releasing her.

She nodded. "I was eating Chinese food—I guess it didn't agree with me—and the next thing I knew you were telling me I was a college professor. Squeeze me again and say it isn't real."

"I'm afraid all the squeezes in the world won't change anything. You're a college professor."

"Of what? Where? How can I teach? I never taught in my life! Why didn't you ask me first?"

"English. Wickerley College. Just be yourself."

"Why, George? Why didn't you speak to me first?"

The telephone rang. She ran to the bedroom to answer it.

"It's for you!" she shouted. When he came to the phone, she covered the mouthpiece and said: "It's a *woman*. How did *she* know where to find you?"

"I told her."

"I'm leaving!" She started to walk out but he pulled her back gently by her hair and put his arm around her.

"Yes?... What?... When? Tonight?... I'll be there tomorrow... I don't know yet. I'm still working on it." He covered the mouthpiece and said to Kate: "There's been a murder at Wickerley. Do you still want to refuse that job?"

"Why didn't you say so in the first place, you goof?"

"She'll be there... Ha! ha! Yeah, it took a bit of persuading but I brought her around... Thank you for calling... No, that's all right. I don't go to bed this early... Good night."

"Tell me all about it."

"Did you ever hear of Warren Quate?"

"The Shakespearean scholar?"

"Yes. He's a professor at Wickerley. Was, I should say. Somebody gave him a fatal dose of arsenic today. He died an hour ago."

"He was young, wasn't he?"

"Mm. Late thirties."

"Who just called you?"

"Dr. Merrick. Naomi Merrick. I had her for drama."

"I didn't know you went to Wickerley!"

"Just one year. Well, Dr. Merrick called me in unofficially. They can't afford a private investigator and they don't want the police department either because of the publicity, so this is strictly my baby."

"And you want me to take over his classes and sort of snoop around, right?"

"Mm-hmm."

"George," she said softly, "why didn't you come right out and tell me? Why all the pussyfooting? Did you think I'd refuse when a murder was involved? Don't you know me better than that?"

"It's *because* I know you so well that I was cautious, don't you see?" he said. "I really am concerned about you and if you were in no—um—condition to work, I wouldn't have allowed you to, so I wouldn't have told you because you would have *insisted*. Are you *sure* you have nothing to tell me?"

She hugged him. "I'm fine." She suddenly became tense. He could feel it.

"What's wrong?"

"I only have a B. A."

"That's all right. I lied. I told them you had a credit equivalent of a Ph. D. but never wrote a thesis."

"But I feel so *stupid!* I feel like a high school dropout teaching college with only *one* degree!"

"Do you want me to call back and say you're chicken?"

"Don't you *dare!*"

The next day at noon, Kate was at the English department office at Wickerley College. Campbell was there with her to introduce her to Dr. Merrick and to give her moral support.

"So *this* is the young lady you told me about, Mr. Campbell. You're very lucky." They thanked her.

Dr. Naomi Merrick was a charming woman with clear blue eyes, graying brown hair and a well-modulated voice. Kate felt foolish for imagining things the night before.

"Dr. Merrick, could you please tell me about my classes now?"

"You don't have a class till two. We have time. Let me show you both the faculty cafeteria."

"Please tell her about her work *now*. I think she's going to have a nervous breakdown if you don't, and I'm the one who'll have to put her together again."

"I don't think you'll have anything to worry about, Kate. Warren had only two courses: freshman composition and the senior Shakespeare seminar." A senior se-

minar! What had she let him get her into?

"A senior seminar? I really don't think I could. . ."

"Don't worry. Just be yourself. We're very informal here, especially in the seminars. If you run out of witty observations, you can always assign parts to the kids and have them read aloud."

This was reassuring. If they started a play from the beginning, she could easily fill fifty minutes.

"I'd like to meet the other members of the faculty who were with Quate yesterday," Campbell said.

"There were just Edith Braden, Alan Sillert, and myself. Edith is at that desk over there. She's Alan's secretary."

From where they stood they could see a plump, round-faced woman who might have been thirty or fifty or anything in between. Her blonde hair looked faded, as did her complexion.

"Where are the others?"

"In the cafeteria. Come this way."

Wickerley College was a group of buildings on Long Island, some of them modern glass boxes, some pathetic old brick buildings. The English department was housed in one of the more pathetic of the old buildings, which was right across the street from the modern glass cafeteria. The English department complained bitterly that the administration spent more to fill bellies than minds.

The faculty cafeteria of Wickerley College was unbelievably well-equipped and efficiently run. It was more an automat than a cafeteria, really.

Dr. Merrick made a beeline for the table nearest the apple machine. Seated there were two men and two women.

". . .I asked him if he liked Kipling and he said 'I wouldn't know; I've never kippled.' "

Dr. Merrick and her guests joined them in time to enjoy the joke. Kate was introduced as "our new substitute," although Dr. Sillert, the chairman, knew that she was working with Campbell. Campbell introduced himself simply as Kate's husband; he did not want them to know what he really was.

Dr. Sillert was a short, wiry man with a thick thatch of milky white hair. The other man at the table, Harold Vann, also of the English department, was a younger man than Dr. Sillert—in his forties, Kate thought—but lacked his liveliness. The two

women were Ivy Greene, chairman of the French department, and Madeleine Hall, another English teacher.

Campbell and Kate listened to faculty gossip and classroom anecdotes until one, when Vann and the two women left to go to classes.

Dr. Sillert, Dr. Merrick, and Campbell escorted Kate to the office which was to be hers until the case was closed. On the desk were Quate's assignment sheets and schedule.

"Please tell me just what happened yesterday, Dr. Sillert."

"One of the students came in and said Dr. Quate was sick and Edith should call the infirmary. I'll go see where she is so you can question her yourself." He left the small office and returned quickly. "She's on the phone. I think she'll be on for a while. Sorry."

Campbell smiled. He would rather the staff did not know he was a detective. They might suspect Kate was too, since they came together, and that would spoil everything. Alan Sillert and Naomi Merrick were the only ones who knew an investigation was going on.

"'t must have been something he ate before class. Did either of you see him then?" Campbell asked.

"We had a scheduled meeting about the curriculum in Alan's office," Dr. Merrick said. "There were just four of us there: Alan, Warren, Edith, and myself. We ate in the office. "

"What was eaten and by whom?"

"Edith sent a student to the cafeteria for salami sandwiches and made the coffee herself," Dr. Sillert replied.

"All of you had salami sandwiches?"

"Yes. They come in sealed cellophane bags. Nobody could have tampered with them."

"You're right, Dr. Merrick. Certainly nobody on the cafeteria staff could have known who was getting which sandwich."

"The cafeteria food is awful, but it couldn't be that," Dr. Sillert said. "It didn't harm the rest of us—more than usual."

"I'm inclined to think it was the coffee. How did all of you take your coffee?"

"I had milk in mine," Dr. Merrick recalled.

"Mine was black and so was Edith's."

"What about Quate?"

"He said he'd like to try the powdered cream," Dr. Sillert said. "He usually prefer-

red milk."

"He told me I'd find it in the cabinet under the bookcase," Dr. Merrick told them. "I had no idea we had any in the office, not that I like the stuff."

"Edith usually buys it and stashes it away under the bookcase," Dr. Merrick repeated, "so I took it out and opened it. I said it was practically empty but he took it from me and poured the last of it into his coffee."

Time passed quickly. The students in the seminar greeted Kate with inquiries after Dr. Quate's health. Kate told them of his death. After fifteen minutes, when the twelve intelligent-looking students quieted down, Kate tried to begin according to Warren Quate's plans.

"Dr. Quate was reading to us from *The Taming of the Shrew*," one of the girls volunteered, handing her her book.

"I feel kind of silly telling you my name is Katharine." The group laughed. "I'd rather you called me Kate."

("Kiss me, Kate," one of the boys scribbled in his margin.)

"What were you up to?"

"Dr. Quate had just begun reading from the beginning."

"**The** Christopher Sly introduction?"

"Yes."

"Most productions—at least the ones I've seen—cut that part out and begin with the Katharine-Bianca plot, but I think the introduction is delightful. Will one of you boys begin reading—from line thirty-three on page twenty-nine?" She assigned parts.

. . " *'This were a bed but cold to sleep so soundly.'* "

" *'O monstrous beast, how like a swine he lies*
Grim death, how foul and loathsome is thine image.' "

And so passed Kate's first hour as a college professor. As she was leaving, a short, brown-haired girl approached her.

"Are you going to teach this course for the rest of the term?"

"Probably. Unless Dr. Sillert can get another Shakespeare specialist."

"I took it for granted *you* were a Shakespeare specialist." This kid had to be joking! "What is your specialty, Dr. . . .?"

"Kate," she corrected her. "Nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction. Detective fiction."

Freshman English was another story. When Kate saw more than forty indistingui-

shable faces riveting their gaze on her, she sat on the desk and pulled her skirt as far below her knees as it would go. She had no faith in the power of her legs to hold her up.

"I—um—I'm your new teacher." She pointed to her name on the board. She wrote it down because she was afraid she would forget it when she opened her mouth. "Dr. Quate, I'm sorry to say, died last night." She paused as the reaction set in. "I'll be your teacher until Dr. Sillert can get somebody bet. . .somebody else."

She went on to talk about the comma, using bad examples she had the students put on the board until the bell rang. She had just begun to warm up to her work, when she saw thick white reports being dropped on her desk as the students filed out. She must have looked bewildered because one of the students answered her unspoken question:

"Our major research papers."

She looked out the window of the door, dreaming of escape. Campbell was waiting outside for her.

("Psst, Sue, is he a teacher here?"

"Never saw him before."

"He's probably her husband."

"He doesn't look like the marrying kind to me."

"You think he's her *lover?*")

"It wasn't so hard, was it, Kate?" Campbell asked as he tied her apron in back.

"The hardest part is tonight."

"What kind of crack is that?"

"Don't be silly." She kissed him. "I meant *this!*"

She picked up the pile of research papers from the table.

"Look at this! 'Homosexual Leanings in Tom Jones,' 'New Developments in Plant Food,' 'The Bible as Communist Propaganda,' 'Clock Design in the Seventeenth Century,' 'Musical Notation in Yugoslavia,'! George, I have to *grade* all this garbage and I have less than a week to do it—if I'm lucky. 'Baroque Cartoon Strips,' 'French Puppet-Heads,' 'The History of Garlic'. That's just a handful! And I still have to read for my column!"

"Don't panic, love. I'll grade them for you. After all, I got you into it."

"To solve a murder. Why should you be subjected to footnotes and annotated bibliographies?"

"Are you refusing my generous once-in-a-lifetime of-

fer?"

"I should, but I can't afford to. If you have any questions, consult the dictionary, term-paper manual, or me."

He picked up "Homosexual Leanings in Tom Jones."

"This looks like a spicy one."

"Then save it for last." She brought the steak to the table.

"Know who's who! Who's who!" cackled the myna bird from the bedroom. "Who figured out the how! How! How! Who figured out the how!"

"Quiet, Edgar, we'll chat later!" Kate shouted back.

"Edgar? Is *that* what you call him?"

"So he's *not* a raven."

"Say, Kate, how was the seminar?"

"When the numbness wears off, I may like it."

"Shakespeare, isn't it?"

"Mm-hmm." She chewed her steak thoughtfully.

"What are you reading with them?"

"*The Taming of the Shrew.*"

He laughed. "My favorite textbook."

"I'm warning you."

"Pass the salt, wasp," he said affectionately.

"'If I be waspish, best beware my sting!'"

He took her steak knife away.

"Yoo-hoo!" she called across the table. Campbell was engrossed in the *Tom Jones* paper. "If you wait till after dinner I'll give you your very own red pencil." He put the paper aside.

"Sorry."

"Aren't you going to tell me what you found out while I was in the torture chambers?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I got to talk to some people—thought I'd pose as a new student. They told me everybody loved Quate. Teachers loved him. Students loved him. Administration loved him. *Everybody* loved him!"

"Students loved him?"

"Yeah. While you were in the other class, I took a few of the kids from the seminar out for pizza and pumped them."

"And?"

"They loved him."

"Maybe one of the girl students loved him a little *too* much and he thought nothing of it."

"I hope not. I'm having enough trouble investigating the faculty. Sillert liked Quate because he wrote a letter that got his son into Yale, among other reasons. Naomi Merrick worked with

him on a study of Jonson. He drove Edith Braden to work four days a week."

"This is the craziest case I ever heard of! A man everybody loved—or *said* they loved—is killed. The only thing I can suggest is investigating bank accounts to see if anyone made any large withdrawals and if anyone else made correspondingly large deposits."

"Blackmail?"

"Mm-hmm. Nobody would have talked about that."

"Do you have any reason to think so?"

"I just told you. Nobody would have mentioned he was being black-mailed or was doing the blackmailing."

"That takes care of tomorrow. Now, where are those papers and that red pencil?"

"You can't read that stuff cold sober," Kate said, handing him a drink and a red pencil.

"Thanks. Now, out of my lap! I've work to do."

Kate settled down on the sofa next to him, prepared to read a new detective novel.

Several minutes later, Campbell began to chuckle.

"Whoever wrote this—the Tom Jones thing—didn't see the movie."

The telephone rang. He went to answer it.

"Hello?" he said.

"Hello," said a woman's voice he had never heard before. "Is Kate there? Is this MO-3-8572?""

"Yes."

"Who *is* this?"

"This is her Uncle *George!* Who is *this?"* He was beginning to feel the effects of the drink.

"Her mother."

The next day only the composition class met. Kate lectured—unexpectedly well, she thought—on the semi-colon. She was saving the period for her last lecture.

After class, Kate went to Alan Sillert's office. Wickerley College's English department certainly *was* underendowed. For one thing, they were desperately in need of chalk.

"Go ahead. Rummage around. There's probably a box in there somewhere." Dr. Sillert motioned toward the cabinet where the powdered cream had been.

Kate found all sorts of things on the three shelves of the low sliding-door cabinet: blue-books, rubber bands, sandwich cookies, scratch pads, cigarettes, a dictionary, and a few slim volumes of poetry, but no chalk.

"Let me help you move

some of those things out. Maybe there's some in the back." He got down on his knees and cleared the top shelf of some of its clutter. "Ah! Here you are. Here's a box of chalk." He reached in back of the cabinet and brought out a flat rectangular cardboard box.

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it." He left his private office and joined the two or three other teachers in the mailbox area.

Kate opened the box and saw only three sticks of chalk, but plenty of chalk dust. She dropped the box into her bag and replaced the other items on the shelf.

"Did you get a look at the students' handwritings?" Campbell asked, as he hung up her coat.

"Why? Did you find any threatening letters or something?"

"No, but you always say 'Know who's who, a good clue to who figured out the how.' "

She smiled; he had learned his lesson well. "I had all of them at the blackboards—half yesterday, half today. I had them write their worst-punctuated sentences as examples of what not to do."

"What about the seminar? Any samples?"

"No. I'll have them write something about themselves tomorrow."

"What have you found so far?"

"The usual late-adolescent instability, but no sign of homicidal mania among them."

"I didn't think so. What'll you have, Kate?"

"Hamburger and French fries. What else can you get here?"

"Cheeseburger. That's what I'm having."

"Sounds swell—if you like rubber cheese."

"We also have omelets." They noticed a waitress standing over their table.

"Two hamburgers. Two coffees." Campbell gave the order.

Kate shrank several inches in her seat.

"I almost forgot!" She removed the box of chalk from her bag and passed it across the table. Campbell opened it and looked at the contents.

"Three sticks of chalk. So what?"

"Look carefully, George."

He smelled the chalk sticks.

"It's real chalk. You didn't think it was marijuana, did you?"

"No. Hold still. You've got chalk on your nose."

She wiped the tip of his

nose with a napkin.

"Then what's so important about the box?"

"The chalk dust."

He smelled the chalk dust and coughed.

"Well?"

"The consistency. Doesn't it seem too coarse to be chalk dust? Chalk dust is very fine, you know."

"That's one of the things about school I managed to forget."

"Take it to the lab tomorrow morning and find out what it is."

"That makes at least *two* things I have to do tomorrow: have this chalk dust analyzed and check the banks."

"Didn't you check the banks *today?*"

"Yes, but I'm not finished."

The hamburgers came.

"Well? Tell me what you found."

"I'm not supposed to talk with food in my mouth," he said—with food in his mouth.

"What I found was this," he said, when he could speak clearly again. "On the fourteenth of every month for the last eleven months one thousand dollars was deposited in the account of Edith Braden."

"Blackmail?"

"I think so. This is in addition to her weekly paycheck."

"Did you find out about Quate? He may have made large withdrawals and finally committed suicide. He was the one who thought of the powdered cream and it was also he who insisted on emptying the jar into his coffee."

"That's all very clever, love, but you forget one thing: if he wanted to die he wouldn't have sent a student for help."

Kate was stymied.

On their way out, she remembered something.

"I *need* the chalk sticks."

"Hey!" Kate shook Campbell, who was reclining on the sofa, drowsing over a student paper on Pre-Elizabethan costume design.

"Hmmm? Why did you wake me?"

"I just thought of something." She sat cross-legged on the floor near where his head was.

"Save it for tomorrow morning. I want to sleep." He closed his eyes again and tried to turn over but his legs were painfully cramped on the too-short sofa with upholstered arm-rests.

She stood up again and tugged on his pajama sleeve. She could not budge him.

"Pre-Elizabethan Costume Design" fell to the floor. All twenty pages of it. She put it on the end table.

"Hello in there," she whispered in his ear. "Don't you think you'd be more comfortable in bed?"

He sat up, blinking sleepily.

"What? Oh, sure. Sure. Say," he said, looking at the clock, "is it one in the morning already?" She led him gently by the hand.

"I was thinking," she said as they walked, "that the poison wasn't meant for Quate at all. If Quate was being blackmailed, the blackmailer didn't kill him. Blackmailers don't kill their victims."

"Unless they threaten to expose the extortion."

"I was thinking of something else."

"Me too. I'm sleepy."

They were in the bedroom now.

"I was thinking that a third person put poison in the jar of powdered cream, thinking that Edith Braden was the only one who liked it."

"That narrows it down to the English department, right?"

"Mm-hmm," she said, stepping out of her slippers. "For two reasons. (One) Edith Braden's tastes and habits aren't known outside the department, and (Two), the faculty members are too busy buttering up the chairmen of their own departments to have coffee with chairmen of other departments, unless, of course, they're department chairmen themselves."

"Then maybe the chairman of another department came in and left the poison for Sillert."

"Do you know what you're doing to me?" She sat down on the edge of the bed at his side. He was comfortably under the covers.

"No."

"You're confusing me."

"Oh?" He pulled her toward him.

"Yes. Here I am trying to think logically and be some help to you and what do *you* do?"

"Enjoy it."

"You lie there, that's what you do," she said, ignoring his interruption. "Not only do you lie there, but you try to fog my mental processes. Know what?" She was on her side of the bed now.

"No. What?" He turned his head on the pillow and looked at her.

"That's not very nice."

The next afternoon, Kate was hurrying down the hall on the second floor of the

English building, and collided head-on with Harold Vann, who was coming from the department office.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry," she said, picking up her books, which had scattered on the floor.

"Think nothing of it," he said, helping her.

"Oh my goodness! Look at your jacket!" Kate exclaimed as they stood up. "The pocket is all stained with green ink! I hope it isn't my fault—I mean, I hope I didn't damage the pen when I bumped into you just now. I'm awfully sorry! Send me the cleaning bill. . ."

"It's not your fault at all. I've been having trouble with this infernal pen all day. As a matter of fact, I was just leaving for the day. Can I drop you somewhere?—if you don't mind waiting while I leave this at the cleaner's."

"Thank you, no. George is coming for me." She twisted her wedding ring with the thumb of the same hand. How green her finger was beneath it!

She walked into the English office and looked in her mailbox. There was only one envelope. She opened it and looked at the message, which was scribbled on the back of the meat bill:

"An apple for the teacher. In fifteen minutes at the apple machine. G." How like him! Fifteen minutes from when? She dropped the envelope into the waste basket in the corner. Then she picked up the basket and carried it across the room to her office.

"Scavenging again, Kate?"

"Oh, Dr. Sillert!"—she could not call him Alan—"I threw something out by mistake."

He smiled and went into his private office.

Kate emptied the contents of the waste basket onto her desk. There were several paper items, which she put in her portfolio, and threw the rest back into the basket: the empty yogurt container, the empty bottle of nail polish remover, a back issue of *Parents'* magazine, and the envelope with her name on it.

As soon as she returned the waste basket to its original position, she hurried to the cafeteria and the appointed spot at the apple machine.

"What did you find out?" she asked, after the usual greeting.

"The name of the murderer. And you?"

"The same."

"Is Dr. Sillert in his office?"

"He was when I left."

"Come on. Let's go find him."

Kate knocked on Dr. Sillert's door.

"Oh, come on in, Kate, Lieutenant Campbell."

"I hope you can spare us a few minutes, Dr. Sillert," Campbell said.

"A few minutes? Yes. I think I can manage that. What's worrying you?"

"Nothing. We just came to tell you that we found out the name of the murderer." Kate sat on the edge of a chair, too excited to feel uncomfortable.

"I hope you don't mean me."

"Oh no, sir," she assured him. "We thought we'd talk to you first because you're *chairman.*"

"Kate and I were thinking of Harold Vann."

Dr. Sillert thought this over for a while, then asked them how they found out.

Campbell spoke. "The chalk dust I had analyzed turned out to be powdered cream. The arsenic—just enough to kill one person—was put in its place. Vann thought Edith Braden, his intended victim, was the only one who liked powdered cream. How was he to know Quate would dump the poison into his coffee?"

"But there must have been a *little* cream left in there to lighten the coffee so the victim wouldn't suspect," Kate said.

"Probably," Campbell replied. "We can only guess, since there was no autopsy. If you want further proof, I checked his bank account. On the twelfth of every month for the last eleven months, Vann withdrew one thousand dollars. Two days later every month the same amount was deposited in Edith Braden's account. Why she was bleeding him, I don't know. How did *you* figure him out, Kate?"

"When I saw the chalk dust, I thought it was either more poison or powdered cream which the murderer left there when he thought he heard someone coming. I narrowed the field down to the faculty—to the English department. Miss Braden would have been suspicious if someone from another department was alone in here. Furthermore, who outside the department would know in advance about her taste for powdered cream? What really gave me the answer was my collision with Vann in the hall. His jacket pocket was stained with green ink. In the office, when I threw away the envelope that was in my box (don't worry, George, I

saved the meat bill) I noticed something in the waste basket. I took the basket to my office and put the papers I removed from it into my portfolio." She opened the portfolio and took from one of the pockets a small envelope with a green stain on the outside. "I looked inside and saw a few grains of powder and thought it was arsenic. And when I saw that green stain! Well, I said to myself, this is *it!* The ink that stained his jacket stained this little envelope in the pocket. He must have just emptied the junk from his pockets before heading for the cleaner's at about the time I bumped into him."

"Good work, Kate." Campbell meant it.

"Kate, may I make a suggestion?"

"Yes, Dr. Sillert?"

"How would you like to finish out the semester?"

Kate looked at Campbell.

"I'd really rather not. It doesn't mix very well with my reviewing job—I have to review a few detective novels a week for my column—and then I work mornings as a graphologist. I don't have the time to prepare lectures and mark papers too."

"Let me make my position clear. We're in a bit of a bind right now, considering we've just lost Quate and now we're losing Vann. We're a small department and we can't put the entire load of a total of six sections—Quate's two and Vann's four—on two or three other teachers who have their own classes and research. There's just a short time left—December, with Christmas week off, and one week in January."

"We—we'll talk it over," Kate said reluctantly. She was slightly dazed. She never thought she'd live to see the day when the chairman of a college English department, albeit a very *small* college, would be begging her to teach, not that she ever had any ambitions in that direction.

"I'll try to talk her into it, Dr. Sillert. Thanks for the offer."

"Good night, sir. I'll let you know. Oh, one last thing: you didn't seem the least bit surprised when we told you about Vann. Did you figure it out too?"

"No. He confided everything to me this morning."

That evening, as Kate was washing their dinner dishes, Campbell sneaked up behind her and kissed her ear gently. She smiled affectionately.

"Make yourself useful

around here! Wipe!"

"Okay. We have something to decide, and it may as well be here in the kitchen."

"Oh?" She blushed as she realized she had been scrubbing the same cup four times.

"Yes. I made a promise, you know."

"I don't remember any promises."

"Well, I made a promise and I'm going to keep it."

She turned off the water and threw her sudsy arms around his neck.

"I don't remember what promise you're talking about, but I love the way you looked when you said you'd keep it!"

He said "I promised I'd I'd talk you into teaching until January," and kissed her before she could object.

Several minutes later, she said, "Well, all right, if it's that important to you."

"Oh, it *is*."

"Why?"

"I want you to finish *The Taming of the Shrew*."

She stuck her tongue out at him and disengaged herself. He took her left hand in his and looked at the gold ring.

"You shouldn't wear that dime-store stuff, love. It turns your finger green."

"You're the one who bought it."

"To be perfectly honest with you, I didn't think of it till the last minute."

"I know. I was with you then, remember?"

"I'm sorry about the unromantic setting."

"Did *I* complain?"

"No. You were great about it."

"Tell me something: What put the whole idea into your head?"

He kissed her again.

"Why should college professors know *every*thing?"

THE LITTLEST MAFIA

A gang of four nine-year old Palermo school children were caught, last Spring, because the leader of the group couldn't resist scrawling in chalk on the board his opinion of their teacher after they'd stolen some money from his desk.

The police called in handwriting experts and soon ran down the gang. When they searched the basement of the boy's home they found a large quantity of explosives—and a sawed-off shotgun. The boy's uncle was a Mafioso wanted by the police, a onetime lieutenant of jailed Mafia chief Luciano Liggio.

in french coin

by S. A. Fay

The telephone finally rang. I picked it up, maybe too quickly. But I was getting anxious.

"Mr. Gragen?"

Even that much let me recognize the voice. The hint of accent helped, but it was mostly the slime that came through. I'm a detective. I've heard lots of voices—mean and harsh, oily and smooth, angry, and, more times than I like to think about, threatening. But if you ask me, this guy squashed when he talked.

"I'm Gragen," I answered. "Get on with it."

There was a pause. Across the room D. raised an eyebrow and exhibited a line of shiny white French teeth. He wasn't supposed to be there at all. When he'd casually presented himself that evening I'd done everything but push him bodily out the door. In my business, when you're doing business, it's not safe to have amateurs around. Ever since D. popped

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We last met young D'Artagnan, descendant of a Marshal of France, in S.A. Fay's MUD IN THE DEVIL'S EYE (SMM, Jan. 1964). That time he also complicated life for a number of people who had not expected him to take such an intense interest in their personal problems. . . .

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over from France I've been trying to convince him of this. Granted a guy can get lucky. But it won't last forever. For instance, a few days back I had a call from —well, I won't give the name, but he was famous for wearing a very well-known lucky piece on a watch chain. Also for being unquestionably the nastiest piece of goods in the city. I've heard that he had men killed for beating him out of a parking place. When he called I wasn't overjoyed, and when he told me to get D. off his back I went about it fast. How the Frenchman ever got mixed up with such a crew I never did learn, but I grabbed him and told him to drop it. Since he was still alive and I'd heard no more I figured he had. But I had other things to do beside nursemaid Frenchmen. I didn't want him around where he could get into trouble. That's why I didn't want him there that night.

But he was. Sitting across the room from me looking average but elegant, his long French face brown in the lamplight. One hand was tossing a coin or something, the other rested lightly on the gold head of his cane. Just the appearance for a guy who might be helpful in a blackmail case. D.—I can't get my tongue around that French name, so that's what I call him, and I'll stick to it—D. just about makes it to normal size; I have both pounds and inches on him. So why had I let him stay? You answer it.

"Here are your instructions." Let's get back to the telephone and the voice which had finally decided to continue.

"Don't interrupt me," it said. "Listen carefully. I won't repeat. Go to Maurent's Beach park. Leave now. It should take you about an hour. Make it; I won't wait. Drive by the entrance and turn in at Long Farm. It's deserted, but the gate will be open. Park there and walk back along the road to the entrance. Come down the stairs by the summer theater and go out to the water's edge. Turn right down the beach. Keep by the water. I'll be watching the whole thing, and I'll see if you're followed, or if anyone else is near. When you reach the big rock climb up—from that side, don't come around. Have the money with you. You'll be given further instructions from there. Don't try anything funny. Do you understand?"

"Yeah. Maurent's Beach, the big rock, Long Farm. But

why all the mystery? My client doesn't want any publicity. That's why you're getting the money, remember? For myself—," I was talking to a dead line. I shrugged. I hadn't expected politeness anyway. I should care. I'd undertaken to deliver the money and get the merchandise. If I'd rather have knocked the guy flat and jumped on him, that was one of the breaks of the game. I don't get hired for pleasant jobs. I got my hat. D. picked up his.

"Nuts!" I told him. "This is private business. Stay here and wait, if you want. Or go home. Or take yourself to a movie. You can't come with me."

"Monsieur, I would not think of it. Pesté! When business is private, it is private. I will go and—as you say—mind my own." He bowed from the waist. Those dark eyes were snapping, but then they always did. As he left he gave the cane a flourish, and I jumped. But then, much as I hate to say it, I always do.

Maurent's Beach is a long, unpleasant ride from town. It's unpleasant in the summer because it's hot and the road is jammed. It's unpleasant in winter because everything is grey and stark and deserted. I was making it on a blowy December night when only a few drivers were stupid enough to be out sharing it with me. The closer I came to the beach the bleaker things looked. Along the side of the bay only the yacht clubs had any lights—the clubs and an occasional lonely boat still hanging around at mooring. The houses and cottages were all shuttered and dark. When I finally rolled into the drive of Long Farm I felt like I had come to the end of the world. The walk down that barren beach didn't improve matters. Do you know how exposed you are on all that empty sand? One black figure against a light background makes a lovely target. Not that I had any particular reason to think I was a target that night. But I had been one before. And actually, the way things turned out, in one sense of the word I was just that.

It was quiet. The only sound, beside the squash of my footsteps, was the surf as it roared. I was a city boy. I didn't like it. I could see the dark hump of the rock in the distance. This of course was the idea, since it worked both ways. I hadn't been to the beach any more than I could help, but that didn't

mean not at all. I'd seen that same spot crowded with picnickers during the summer, and I knew that on the opposite side there was a little indentation, almost a cave. I figured my man to be hiding there and all I would have to do would be reach the money down to him. From the rear —his, the other side of the rock—he was safeguarded by more blank sand stretching to the next rocky point. He could see all around him, and he could also keep an eye on the road. A good spot, if you had a nasty mind and were expecting rough stuff, or even if you just wanted to be sure no one was watching to identify you. A blackmailer lives longer when he's unknown.

I reached the rock. The water was already lapping the front of it. I climbed up and parked myself on top. It was awkward going. One hand was full of briefcase and the other held a flashlight I hadn't dared to use. I made noise enough to announce my arrival. But nothing happened. There was no message waiting, that I could see, and no sound from the other side. I waited a few minutes, cold and uncomfortable, then decided to use the flash.

It found him all right. He was lying on his face right at the mouth of the little cave. The water was pushing at the lower part of his body. I slid down to him. As I got close I could see, under the wet hair, the outline of a crushed skull. His arms were flung forward over his head. I lifted one, gingerly shoving back the wet cuff to feel for a pulse. I knew there would be none. There wasn't. I'd seen death before, and maybe in worse places, but for some reason there was a strange pounding going on in my head. Before I could think clearly, or at all, there was another sound—the wail of a siren. Some one had given me a gift of a dead body with a matching set of police.

I'm not the fastest thinker in the world. But I knew damn well, right then, the spot I was in. I remembered all that blank sand and I knew there were no footprints but mine, nice and fresh and lonesome. There were ways, of course, but with a fresh corpse, and a pile of money I'd been going to give him, things would be uncomfortable. And unless I was mistaken I didn't have time, even at a dead run, to make the car before I was spotted.

I was leaning over the body

with all this churning in my mind. The pounding was still going on, and there seemed to be a kind of splashing along with it. Then it stopped. Something blew heavily on my neck. I knew, the way you do, it wasn't anything human. I jumped back and grabbed my gun. I guess I also yelled. From somewhere above the large black hulk in front of me a voice remarked with impatience—

"Pardieu! Would you tell the police exactly where we are? In such affairs, Monsieur, it is better to make use of silence."

"D! What the hell are you doing here?"

"Minding my business, as you see, monsieur. I am giving myself the entertainment of an evening ride."

"That's a horse?"

"Mordieu, Monsieur! What else do you ride in this county? I—how do you say—borrowed him from the dude ranch down the road. Since he is here, I suggest we use him to remove ourselves. It would not do to give trouble to the police. Perhaps it would even be advisable to take along this—gentleman's —wallet and whatever it was he was to give you. Since you are on the ground and I am not, Monsieur—"

As I said, there are things about which I'm not too quick. But searching a body, dead or alive, isn't one of them. I got the wallet and a thick envelope which was all of interest there was on him. I dumped them both into the briefcase and ran around to the side of the horse. The thing snorted but seemed ready to do whatever D. told it. At least it stood still while he clamped a long hand around my wrist—I've had on handcuffs that felt easier to shake loose—and hauled. I went up and sliding over what seemed to be the horse's shoulders. From what I've seen the way to ride is sitting, not sprawled over and hanging down on both sides. I believe it. D. kept one hand on me and one on the horse's hair—mane, I guess —and we went racing down the beach. We stayed a few inches in the water so as not to leave a trail. As a result we moved in a shower of spray. I was half-drowned by the time we rounded the point and swung in toward Long Farm. There was a fence between it and us. I shut my eyes. The horse's back came up and hit me and I opened them a minute too soon. My nose was just passing about an inch above the railing. I closed my eyes again. The next thing I knew

we skidded to a stop and D. was dumping me on the ground beside my car.

"Chut! Monsieur, do not just lie there! It is necessary to depart with dispatch. I will meet you at your apartment."

There was a shower of stones. The horse and D. were gone. I pulled myself into the car and was driving peacefully back to town before, I think, the cops reached the body. I took the precaution of going back the long way, making a circuit that avoided the entrance to the beach. I drove within the limits, but I didn't take an unnecessary time. When I reached home D. was leaning against the wall waiting.

"What did you do, fly?" I snapped at him.

"My family have always been peerless horsemen." He showed his teeth at me. "Fortunately. Naturally, in this day when the horse is much replaced by the automobile—," he shrugged.

"You are also peerless drivers."

"What would you have, Monsieur?" He made a gesture indicating modesty. "It is the family trait."

"Oh, come inside."

As first order of business I stripped and washed and changed to clothes that weren't soggy and sandy. I went back into the living room. That innocent French face turned toward me. I was grateful enough, but I had an impulse to punch it right in the nose.

"Just what," I snarled, "were you doing down there?"

"Pardon, Monsieur?"

"What were you and Pegasus doing at the beach?"

"Oh, that? It is like this, Monsieur. Having planned on your company this evening I had, as you say, the time on the hands. You had mentioned Maurent's Beach, and I said to myself, 'Chut! There is, so I remember, a fine dude ranch at that beach.' It is hard, Monsieur, to find horses in this country. My family have always been—"

"Skip it. Get to the point."

"Exactly, Monsieur. A winter evening is a fine time for a ride. Pardieu! That is all there is. I thought it would be well to arrive before you—you had business, Monsieur, and I would not want to seem to interfere."

"Or attract notice from me or anyone watching me. Naturally. And your family are peerless drivers."

"You are too kind, Monsieur. Unfortunately, when I arrived the ranch seemed to be closed. But there were

horses in one of the fields. I said to myself, 'the kind Americans will not mind.' I also said to myself, 'perhaps I might ride down the beach and see what kind of exit he has planned, this man who meets Monsieur Gragen.' It seemed to me, Monsieur, that he might wish you to have a long walk along the beach, but for himself," a Gallic shrug, "Peste! It would be well to be able to leave quickly. A boat, perhaps, or even a horse. But you do not often, in this country, ride the horse. It is too bad. A horse, moving slowly through water, he makes little noise. Nothing to be heard above other sounds. Nothing for which a man might listen. I said to myself—"

"You figured to creep up on the guy and scare hell out of him!"

"Mordieu! What would you have? Americans are so kind-hearted—"

"Did I ask you to meddle in this?"

"Monsieur," with dignity, "my family does not meddle. If I wished to take a little ride—"

"O.K. Forget it. You just happened to be there, and just happened to, temporarily, get me out of a beautiful frame."

"Pardon?"

"Frame. It was set up to look as if I'd done it. It still does. Who else would know where he was going to be? I bet he didn't use any pick up place more than once. And I bet he made sure he wasn't followed. The only traces were mine. So tell me, you French smart guy, what next?"

"Monsieur, it is not I who am the detective. If it were," the white teeth flashed, "I think I would examine the gentleman's wallet, and perhaps the envelope there on the table. Such men are always not exact about keeping their word."

"That wallet has to go right to the police. I should never have taken it. Anything I did find in it I'd have to tell them about anyway. As for the envelope, I gave my word to deliver it unexamined."

"Pardieu! Monsieur, why did you not tell me? While you were—refreshing—I occupied myself, very innocently—"

I sighed.

"What was in the envelope?"

"Pictures, Monsieur. Nothing, of course, that would mean a thing to me, a Frenchman. But I must say Monsieur," the brown eyes were steady on my face, "in

France we do have, perhaps, a quirk. We do not often pay for pictures without negatives."

I swore. It figured, of course. Had the meeting gone as planned I would have checked it. As it was—D. was bland. These things happened. There was nothing for us to do about it. He spread his hands.

"As you say, Monsieur, it would not be correct for us to examine the wallet. We must mail it to the police immediately. It is a matter for them entirely. As for us—chut! We French are an imaginative race. Do you know, my imagination tells me that man's name was J. Runyan, and his address—perhaps, Monsieur, it would do to trust my imagination?"

"Did your imagination also come up with the keys?"

"There were no keys with the body? Pardieu! The murderer may perhaps have them. That is to make it, Monsieur, the more interesting.

"For me. This is *my* business, not yours!"

"But of course, Monsieur."

We went about my business in his car. For one thing, mine was better known to the cops, should they have discovered the identity of the corpse already and been watching his place. Or, for that matter, looking for me. Also, D. WAS a damn good driver. And I wanted to concentrate on the problem and not the road. As I said, when a blackmailer is killed at a meeting only he and his victim, or his victim's representative, figure to know about, the field of inquiry isn't as large as it might be. How did whoever killed him know where he'd be?

"The apartment house of Monsieur Runyan," D. announced. He drew the car into an unobstrusive but handy spot. We took a look. It was, as might be expected from a guy who lived on other people's money, quite a fancy place. It faced the water, in fact we had driven almost half the way back to the beach. It was one of those jazzy apartments that cater mostly to rich summer residents. They—the apartments—usually have long halls with a lot of doors and though this one would be far from filled in December it was still no place to stand around trying to pick a lock. I said as much.

"Fortunately, Monsieur, it has both windows and a roof. It is then necessary only to find a rope. As it happens there is such a rope in the back seat."

"Good God! What were you in France. A housebreaker?"

"My ancestor, Monsieur, was a marshal of France."

"All right, I'm sorry."

"We do have a certain athletic prowess."

I saw an example of his athletic prowess as he swung casually back and forth before the window we checked out as Runyan's. It was a black night and I couldn't make out his face, but his back expressed a disgusting sense of enjoyment. He made short work of reaching the window and opening it, ancestor or no ancestor. Once he was in I went back down to the door. I thought he'd be there with it ready to open, but he was slow. Not enough to be noticeable to anyone watching, just slow to me. Once inside we closed the blinds and used our flashlights. Again, there was always the chance the cops would come along and take a look up at the windows.

It was a modern, bare kind of place. I couldn't see anyone hiding there, unnoticed, while that call went through to me. It didn't run to fireplaces, but there was a large metal waste basket in the middle of the floor with a nasty smelling mess in the middle of it.

"Negatives." D. flashed his light at the ashes. "Papers also. He was too impatient, our murderer. He could not force himself to wait and do the job completely."

"I can see his point. What do you think you're doing with that?"

"Pardieu, Monsieur! There is an alotted place for filth, and that is where I am taking it."

So he did, in spite of rather half-hearted protests for me. I had gone this far in the hopes of getting rid of those negatives, so why argue? For such a fancy apartment the plumbing wasn't too good. It made such a noise I never heard the door open. I'd followed along into the bedroom then changed my mind and decided to take a look at the desk. As I stepped back through the door to the living room something landed hard on the side of my head and I went sprawling forward in the middle of a shower of lights. They steadied into one light which turned out to be the overhead of the apartment. It had been snapped on by a pretty blonde standing in the little hallway. By the bedroom door was her boyfriend, a young giant with his left fist still balled from socking me and a big fat gun in his

right. He was looking at his handywork and he didn't appear to like what he saw."

"All right, you—," he started.

"Jimmy," the girl shook her head. "That's not him."

"Pardon, Monsieur," a polite voice asked, "but why did you knock my friend to the floor?"

Jimmy responded with a looping swing of that big left. It had the result which might be expected. D. dodged under it as if thinking of something else. He scooped up the cane he'd left lying on one of the chairs. Before Jimmy could complete his turn there was the smashing sound of hard wood on bone. The gun flew across the room. The young man grabbed his injured wrist and got a cane stroke in his stomach and another smashed over his head. He went down, no fight left. The girl dove for the gun and came up with it before I could move. But by that time the cane had changed character and was pointing at Jimmy's throat not as a piece of wood but as a long thin blade.

"Mademoiselle?" said D.

"Who are you?" The gun wavered, then fell. "What are you doing here?"

"Isn't he—?" Jimmy was beginning to take a renewed interest in the proceedings. "He has an accent."

"What accent? Monsieur—"

"I've never seen him before! I've never seen either one of them. Please," she threw the gun into a chair, causing all three men to wince. "Please, take that thing away from Jimmy's throat."

"But of course, Mademoiselle. Peste! This is a very confusing country. Perhaps it would be well if we explained matters between ourselves." He removed the sword and made a slight bow to Jimmy. "My apologies, Monsieur, if I have injured you."

"Sure," said Jimmy.

"There's not really much to explain." The girl sank wearily into a chair—not the one with the gun. I'd taken care of that.

"Since you're here you must know the man who lives in this apartment."

"Monsieur Runyan."

"That's one of his names. I don't know what he pretends to do for a living—"

"He is a cook at one of the yacht clubs." D. gave me an innocent look. "Chut! Monsieur, I have a thorough imagination."

"A cook. How funny."

"Mademoiselle?"

"Funny for me. To be married to a cook. That's what it is, you see. I was married to him—long ago, when I was—"

"Young," I suggested. She was an ancient twenty-three or four then, with the kind of pale blond hair that never saw a bottle and the firm little features of a fighter. I meant to cheer her up and maybe I did. I got a slight smile, anyway, before she continued.

"When I was stupid, I guess, and romantic, and thought dark good looks and an accent were all that were necessary for an ideal man." Jimmy, who had neither, glared at D. He got a cool French stare in return. D. would accept the dark good looks as his due but no one could sell him the fact he had an accent. The rest of the story was normal enough. The quick marriage, the quicker break-up, the engagement now to Jimmy, whose parents would take a dim view of Runyan, or publicity of any kind, or, certainly, the rather doubtful state of the divorce. Runyan had somehow learned of this state of affairs and started making demands.

"More demands. Actually I've been paying him a sort of—alimony. I mailed a monthly check to a post box number under the name—my married name. That wasn't too bad. We can—could afford it. But now things are worse; my father's business is in a difficult state. He wanted so much, and gave me so little time. Our," she looked at Jimmy, "our marriage was supposed to be next month."

"It will be next month. If I have to beat his brains out."

"That was your plan, Mademoiselle?"

"We—there was no other way. We thought perhaps we could frighten him. He wasn't very brave; or very clever. I found out where he lived by watching the bank where he cashed my checks and then following him. I told Jimmy. We came the first night we could. When we saw the window was dark we thought we'd try and get in and be waiting for him."

"You had keys, Mademoiselle?"

"That's the funny part. We didn't. Jimmy was going to try to break in. We came sneaking up the back stairs so no one would see us. On one of the landings we found these." She held them out. "The apartment number is on the house key. We knew

it, of course. We took them along and let ourselves in. And found you. I don't understand—," the hurrying stamp of feet in the corridor stopped her mid-sentence. Her face went white. "Who's that? Is something—did—"

"Pesté!" D. made a leap to the door, snapped the bolt in place and flipped out the light. "Something did, Mademoiselle. Why do the police of this country never rest themselves? It would seem advisable, Mademoiselle, messieurs, that we leave by the window."

"Are you crazy? The cops may have men on the roof!"

"I took the precaution, Monsieur, of finding myself an empty apartment on the floor above. The rope will now take us there. With dispatch."

Voices were grumbling at the door as we scrambled out the bedroom window. All of us, except maybe D., had enough to lose to take pretty desperate chances. The rope waved to and fro and the wall felt like slick glass, which it wasn't. I was saying prayers, or at any rate something, all the way. I can imagine the picture we made, practically a mass exodus crawling up the apartment wall. But Jimmy was an athlete, D. was a cat, and the girl and I weren't too bad. The bolt delayed things long enough, and we made it, God knows how. We rode down in style in the elevator and no one said a word. Including me.

When we reached the car I took a long breath and asked D. when he was going back to France. He said "Monsieur" at me and suggested we take the girl home. He thought it would be a good idea for Jimmy to make himself scarce. There was a certain amount of token resistence to the plan but all parties were willing to call it a night pretty gratefully. So the kid went one way and we went the other.

Home was a boat. The "big house," it seemed, had been rented, presumably to save on expenses, although in my book a boat comes under that heading. Her father and the captain were up and prowling when we arrived. They expressed concern. We were introduced. D. strolled aboard with the air of a man seriously considering buying a yacht. He more or less forced them to show him that one. I tagged along, of course. It was some rig. I expected the neat little cabins but the tiny office, complete with typewriter and dictaphone, the paneled dining room and ela-

borate lounge, took me by surprise. So that was how their half lived. D. was very Gascon. Until, at least, the girl gave up and went to bed and the father began pointedly getting rid of us. Then, to my complete astonishment, he announced he wanted an autograph from his first American millionaire. There was what they call a pregnant pause. Personally I thought he had goofed his gumdrops. I was embarrassed for both of us. The millionaire in question took it well. He smiled and said he'd be glad to oblige his daughter's friend.

"You are too kind, Monsieur. But you must write something personal with it."

"All right." The man was still smiling, which did him credit. I was not. If I ever got D. off that boat I was planning a series of lectures. What got me was the fact the Frenchman was so unperturbed. He stood there, smiling slightly, while his victim, so to speak, got a pen and paper.

"What would you like?" the man asked. "Anything in particular?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur, I did have something in mind. I thought," D. was still smiling, "a short confession would be nice. I do not know exactly how they word things in this country, but I am sure something simple would suffice."

"Just what—to what did you want me to confess?"

"To the murder, Monsieur. Of Monsieur Runyan—whatever name you knew him by. You are shocked, Monsieur. My apologies. But, pesté! Why, between us, should we pretend? I would not be so impolite as to insist, but there is the possibility my friend Monsieur Gragen might be blamed for this. What would you? One must take precautions."

I knew he'd hit it. I knew from the tone of voice the man had used, and from his face. I knew from the sudden sharp movement the captain had made. These two were amateurs. They didn't even try to face him down. But I didn't expect such a complete break. And I wasn't ready for the captain's movement to turn into a rush that threw him on what appeared to be a defenceless Frenchman. So I was caught, for the moment, frozen and useless.

That moment was all it took. D. didn't hurt him. He just moved aside and shoved his cane between those charging legs. The captain went skidding, seat downward, across the lounge. The

other man had made a dive for the table. He got his hand in the drawer, then the slender silver sword whipped free and flashed through the air. The point went through the fleshy part of the reaching arm and pinned it to the wood.

"Pardieu, Monsieur! What foolishness!" D. slid the sword loose and lifted its point to the man's neck. The gun lay in full sight. I removed it while the captain was picking himself off the floor. The grey-haired man had made no sound, though I imagine his arm was pretty painful. He stood with his chin slightly raised and his eyes on the gleaming metal by his neck. There was no sign of fear on his face, but plenty of despair.

"Monsieur?" said D.

"That gun—believe me, it wasn't for you."

"For yourself, Monsieur? Perhaps. However, I do not see that that is necessary. I have told you, this confession, it is a precaution only. A precaution to be used, Monsieur, only if the occasion warrants."

"Or when you want to try a little blackmail yourself?"

"My ancestor was a marshal of France, Monsieur. I would not, as you say, hold your breath. My apologies for the sword thrust, Monsieur. I hope you will have no trouble writing."

He didn't. He wrote it down, a few words that might mean life or death, and signed it. He wanted, naturally, to know how the Frenchman had known. D. shrugged.

"I did not know, Monsieur. I surmised. The upper part of Monsieur Runyan was wet, but the tide had not yet come that far. So it would seem he had been brought through the water. I said to myself, 'Chut! If a boat carried Monsieur Runyan most of the way, and someone swam the rest, it would look as it does now. But,' I said to myself, Monsieur, 'how is it the person knew this spot? Could it not be that it was the place of another blackmail meeting, and that the instructions Monsieur Gragen received had been given before to someone else, and perhaps recorded, on the chance they might some day be proof? Could it not be that recording Monsieur Gragen heard? All this I asked myself, Monsieur. I imagined how I would feel if I had been blackmailed by Monsieur Runyan, and somehow discovered his identity. I might go and threaten him, and bring with me a record

of his blackmailing. But, pesté! Such a man is not sensible. I would get angry, arguing, and would not go when he tried to get rid of me. Finally, he would have to make a phone call, whether I had gone or I had not gone. He would turn his back to me, pick up the phone, and I would remember how he had done the same to me, and just as he said 'Hello,' I would hit him, I think, Monsieur. Then, if I were quick-thinking, like a business man, I would perhaps play the recording so the person on the phone would think the man still lived. I would search the apartment, and burn what I found, and while I was doing this I would think to myself, 'Suppose I take him and leave him by the rock? Then the man on the phone will find him, and it will seem he did it.' So I would drag the body out, down the back stairs—losing the keys on the way, Monsieur. That, I said to myself, is what I might do. If I weren't, of course," he showed his teeth, "who I am."

"I swear to you—I never meant an innocent person to take the blame. I just wanted to confuse things!"

"It is to be hoped, Monsieur. As for yourself, a cook hears and is not seen. How would some one find out about this man? Who would know him? His was a good position for a blackmailer, but only, Monsieur, while he did not blackmail those who might know him personally. People who could trace him—your daughter, yourself—they would be a risk, Monsieur. Mordieu! So it proved. The night your daughter picked, the first night available to her, was also selected by the murderer. And you, Monsieur, had a boat, and were as desperate as she. Chut! What would you?"

"You *guessed!*"

"As you say, Monsieur. Certainly I did not see it, me."

"Look." The grey-haired man sat down heavily. The captain came over to stand rigid behind him. "I don't want to seem to—as it happens, gentlemen, both my business and my health are—on the way out. That's one reason I was so desperate. My daughter—I'm certainly not going to go unpunished. If you can—"

"I have said it, Monsieur. A precaution only. I do not think you will have cause to worry. Good-night, Monsieur."

"Why the hell," I asked as we stepped back onto the dock, "did you tell him not

to worry? What makes you think the cops won't be on all our tails by morning?"

"Pardieu! Is it for me, Monsieur, to know the ways of your American police? Let us talk of something else. Chut! That is to remind me. That gentleman, Monsieur, that you told me it would be wise to avoid—"

"Good God! Don't tell me you've gotten mixed up with him again. D., he'll chew you into little pieces! That man is deadly! I told you—"

"Pesté! Calm yourself, Monsieur. He is indeed most unpleasant. I found it necessary, in dealing with him, to remove what you call his famous lucky piece."

"You WHAT?"

"Mordieu!" He sighed. "I am ashamed, Monsieur. I was so careless as to drop it by the body. A most regrettable loss. The police, I fear, will connect it with him. They will imagine the worst. It is sad, Monsieur, to have a bad reputation."

I shook my head.

"D., you—dropped it? From horseback? You threw it!"

"As you wish, Monsieur. I do not argue. We D'Artagnans," he unsheathed the cane and examined it as he spoke. It was a bit stained. He stretched it out and used the point to snag a bit of cloth that was caught on some of the brass of the boat behind us. As he wiped the blade with it the dock lights showed up the garish pattern just as my flash had shone on the same pattern when I stood by the rock. D. dropped the cloth into the water. He smiled.

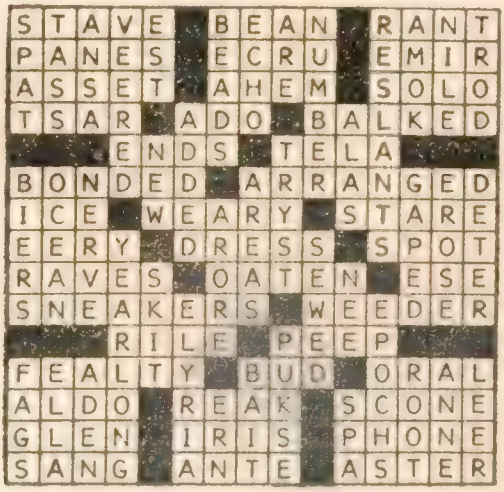
"We D'Artagnans," he continued, "are a very amiable family."

THE SOLUTION

to the

PUZZLE

on page 99



what's new in crime

by Stefan Santesson

John Dickson Carr's new Dr. Fell novel, PANIC IN BOX C (Harper & Row, $4.95), will be welcomed by the many who have a special affection for the irrepressible Dr. Fell whom we meet, almost immediately, "throned in the largest armchair, wheezing and chuckling through all twenty-odd stone of him.....wedged there in vastness like Father Christmas or Old King Cole, with lighted cigar in one hand and a tall glass in the other."

Philip Knox meets Dr. Fell, an old friend, on the R.M.S. *Illyria,* westbound for New York. Both are to lecture in the States, Knox on *"Mysteries of the Past,* some classic riddles of history," and Dr. Fell, appropriately enough, on *"Murderers I Have Met".* But neither of them can anticipate that, even before the ship docks in New York, they will have been witnesses to the opening passages in still another Comedy

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The writer, whose anthology, THE AWARD ESPIONAGE READER, was published by Award Books last year, has been editor of this magazine since 1956. Formerly, 1945-'52, editor, Unicorn Mystery Book Club, he was awarded the 1963 Critics' Edgar by the Mystery Writers of America.

of Death, involving a noted (but hardly distinguished) actress, and assorted ghosts from that lady's past. And that of Philip Knox.... Do read this.

By way of contrast, we have Richard S. Prather's rather extraordinary excursion into a sub-Freudian dream-world, THE KUBLA KHAN CAPER (Trident Press, $3.95), which will no doubt appeal to some. This is the thirty-fifth Shell Scott mystery to be written by Mr. Prather and it must be noted, with due objectivity, that Mr. Scott shows no sign of age as, inbetween hunting for a murderer, he carries on his investigation in the by now classic Shell Scott manner. There are more undraped—but not unwilling—persons to be questioned than I can recall in other novels of this sort, and Mr. Scott approaches the questioning of each and every one of them with admirable single-mindedness — and enthusiasm. And dedication.

Gordon Ashe's A TASTE OF TREASURE (Holt, Rinehart & Winston), is a novel in the classic Ashe-Creasey tradition, which means it is rich in color and background, the protagonists are sharply drawn but appealing, and you find yourself understanding the pull of Queensland where everywhere there is a wild beauty, of a kind you have never seen before, and the men can be "strong and hard, but with a promise of peace." This part of Australia is possibly the last frontier, and it is logical that Crime can be drawn in the sharp colors it is here, almost dwarfing Deputy Commissioner Patrick Dawlish.

Christopher Bush's new Ludovic Travers novel, THE CASE OF THE JUMBO SANDWICH (Macmillan, $3.95) is, on the other hand, a mystery story in that classic tradition which, in the States, is so often, and so mistakenly, identified as British—and without a dative qualification. Travers is as urbane as ever (substitute another word, if you wish. .) as he tracks down the man who had first cheated Isabel Herne at the Newmarket sales.

Very pleasant. Do read this.

Speaking of Newmarket, I have yet to attend the Newmarket sales, but I did watch the annual yearling sales at Saratoga Springs, early in August, from the garden of the adjacent *Spuyten Duyvil,*

just as described in Leighla Whipper's IN SPITE OF THE DEVIL in the October 1966 issue (November 1966 issue, British edition). I spent a good deal of time at the *Spuyten Duyvil* as a matter of fact, meeting many of the people described in the story and having a marvelously relaxed time. Dr. Edwin Moseley, Dean of Faculty, Skidmore College, was kind enough to give me lunch and to show me the new Skidmore Campus. I stopped in to see Bill Ringle, Managing Editor, *The Saratogian* (it turned out we had mutual friends) and wandered around the town which I hope to return to one day. Perhaps next August....

Some weeks later, Labor Day weekend, I was in Cleveland, Ohio, attending the World Science Fiction Convention there, meeting friends and contributors to both this magazine and *Fantastic Universe,* and seizing the opportunity to see Abdul Wahid and Khalilur Rahman, friends from the '30's and early '40's, long resident in Cleveland.

Jon Cleary's extremely effective THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (Morrow, $4.50), tells what happens when Detective Sergeant Scobie Malone is sent to London from Sydney—to arrest the Australian High Commissioner for murder. John James Quentin, the High Commissioner and Australia's leading representative at a conference trying to "settle a cease-fire in Vietnam", and coincidentally the target of assassins, gains a few days of grace, until the conference is to end, and then Malone is to take him back to Australia, to face trial for the murder of his first wife. The question of whether he is or is not guilty, answered in the novel, is not as interesting as the possibility posed that it could be possible for a man to vanish, in wartime Australia, and then reappear and begin to build a new life, *becoming prominent in politics.*

Matt Erridge and his mother have a number of rather unorthodox adventures in Aaron Marc Stein's I FEAR THE GREEKS (Doubleday, $3.50), as Matt is suspected of extra-curricular activities —and his mother meets the Greeks, and a number of less amiable persons. Do read this.

Erle Stanley Gardner's new Perry Mason novel, THE CASE OF THE WORRIED

WAITRESS (Morrow, $3.50) is likewise in the classic tradition. But where I must admit that while I at least find the indomitable Shell Scott somewhat hard to believe in, Perry Mason is by now, for obvious reasons, closer to being part of our national folklore, —the sort of lawyer whom we like to believe exists, without the flamboyance of a Belli or a Foreman. And his clients are the sort of people we all know, not necessarily monotonously—and amorally—pulchitrudinous, but more like the men and women many of us went to school with, grew up with, or bump into in the subways (ie., the underground) between the rush hours. These are in other words credible people, flesh and blood people in whom we can almost believe, and this, I think, is one of the reasons for the importance in the field of Erle Stanley Gardner's always enjoyable Perry Mason novels.

*

I normally do not comment on books which are not sent to us for review, but I do want to recommend Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe novel, THE DOORBELL RANG (Viking, $3.50), if you've not as yet read it. We are told that "this is, in the considered opinion of the publishers, the finest detective story ever written by Rex Stout and therefore one of the best ever written by anyone." This is perhaps a mild exaggeration on the part of the publishers, for which they may, in view of the plot, be forgiven. And in fact even respected .

The controversial aspects of the novel have of course been exaggerated. This is understandable. It is worth noting however that Mr. Stout, who does not share the belief of some writers in this field that workers in the genre should eschew Reality, is a founder and member of the Board of Directors of Freedom House, Chairman of the Writers' Board for World Government since 1949 and, since 1951, President of the Authors League of America. Mr. Stout is in other words a distinguished American Writer who is not unaware of the fact—that the world is round. . . .

Anthony McCall's OPERATION DELTA (Trident Press, $4.95), described by the publishers as "an unusual tale of espionage", is precisely this, having as it does the ingredients demanded in this *Intrex*-conscious (age) *will we ever be as innocent as we*

were when the world was younger?), plus a healthy dose of social realism, unthinkable in the average excursion into the world of the licensed killers. This is contributed by Maurice Lauriac, a Haitian by birth and one of this country's most distinguished electronics engineers. Lauriac, who had "laid out blueprints for the most sophisticated missile system known to man", is one of the targets of the extraordinarily complicated—but credible—plot to cripple the supersecret Operation Delta. Lauriac's involvement in the beautifully described civil rights struggle in "Blenheim"—the identification of the Chief of Police as "Bull" Hauptner rather identifies the town in question—complicates life both for the conspirator, and for Chris Adam, head of Adam Associates, for whom Lauriac, and the others affected by the conspiracy, all work. Don't miss this!

John Putnam Thatcher encounters—and survives—another aspect of the Civil Rights struggle, as Wall Street is invaded by demonstrators aroused by the possibility that Edward Parry may possibly be denied a seat on the New York Stock Exchange because of his race. Emma Lathen's DEATH SHALL OVERCOME (Macmillan, $3.95), her latest novel about the rather unorthodox Senior Vice President of Sloan Guaranty Trust, is a wicked and thoroughly delightful novel about a group of people (including the novelist Richard Simpson, "noted for his simpleminded and successful novels about an expatriate in Paris and his beautiful relationship with a sylphlike busboy") whose stand on this issue, pro-and-con, causes Thatcher to live through some harrowing—and surprising—days. Don't miss this!

John Ball's THE COOL COTTONTAIL (Harper & Row, $4.50), while perhaps not as effective as his earlier novel, IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT, which won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar for the Best First Mystery of the Year, possibly because of the author's unnecessary anxiety to explain his hero, has some amusing moments. Virgil Tibbs, a detective on the Pasadena police force, investigates the murder of a man whose nude body has been found floating in the pool at Sun Valley Lodge, in a nudist park. Tibbs, because of his back-

ground, inevitably runs into problems and situations which, as we all know, are characteristic of our urban society. To this extent, although the incidents in question are perhaps too broadly drawn, the novel is a valid sociological picture of our times. Where I part company, however, with the author, is not so much in the identity of the murderer as in his motivation. This should have been more clearly spelled out. Much more so. The murderer is said to have taken the "full course in street fighting" of a group he had joined, and to have committed the murder as an act of vengeance against his and his people's enemies. I am afraid this is a dangerous stereotype.

George Bagby's latest Inspector Schmidt novel, DIRTY POOL (Doubleday, $3.50), has to do with the misadventures of a decorative but not too bright young woman who becomes the object of the deadly attentions of a group of men whom she had unfortunately met under conditions which soon made her privy to their secrets, and to a death. Justice triumphs. And the young lady gets her man. A pleasant novel, as you always expect from this author.

There seem to be a lot of us who thoroughly enjoy the irrepressible—but not improbable—Milo March and his adventures. I had that proven to me again, only the other evening, at a dinner of the Booksellers League here in New York, when an officer of that organization mentioned that she had just been reading—and thoroughly enjoying—M.E. Chaber's fifteenth Milo March novel, THE DAY IT RAINED DIAMONDS (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.95), and we talked about the author, whom we both know.

Milo March is on vacation in Los Angeles. He takes a girl out to dinner—a friend of his host, an interior decorator who, it turns out, had done the apartment he is staying in... When she leaves him, she goes upstairs in the same building and, so the police say, shoots a man dead—her boyfriend and/or business associate, depending on which story you buy. Within hours of first meeting her March, therefore, finds himself—on behalf of Intercontinental Insurance—trying to establish her innocense. And in doing this he has to contend not only with the local cops, but also with the

local Syndicate boys—and a prettier sissy than he could ever be.... Do read this.

Philip McCutchan's new Commander Shaw novel, MOSCOW COACH (John Day, $4.50), has our indomitable hero, a member of British Defense Intelligence, joining a Moscow-bound coach tour in West Berlin. His assignment is to stop one of the passengers—identity unknown at this stage—who is reported planning to assassinate General Kosyenko, First Vice Chairman, Council of Ministers of the Supreme Soviet. The Deputy Head of Security Services is ordered, in the language of the official instructions, to "locate and inhibit" the man "in whatever country he may be found and is given absolute discretion to use whatever means may be necessary to this end."

Lesley Egan's SOME AVENGER, RISE! (Harper & Row, $4.50), her newest novel about the Jesse Falkenstein, has the attorney take a hand as Sergeant Clock of the Los Angeles Police Force, is accused of having accepted a bribe by the police Internal Affairs Section. The "evidence" against Clock is convincing. What Jesse Falkenstein proceeds to do is to track down the story behind that "evidence"....

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the path

by Evelyn Dickey

Emmy put aside the mending when she heard the first crack of lightning. It was almost suppertime and the beets had to be pulled before it clouded up too dark to see. Rainstorms came up sudden in the hill country, and sometimes struck so hard the whole cabin shook from their violence.

Emmy didn't mind getting wet. The rain was a friend when it came, filling the creek beds and soaking her vegetable patch; it left everything clean and smelling sweet.

She stood on the back porch, a thin young girl with dark brown hair that hung down her back, and sniffed the heavy air.

"Gar!" She exclaimed. "Those dern fish heads! And Paw promised he would bury 'em afore he went fishin' this mornin'."

She held her nose daintily with two fingers, and with the other hand she waved away the flies that hovered

It is unusual to come across a story which gets across so well the feeling of the hill country. The hills are unknown to most of us who know only the cities and the towns into which we crowd for the many and varied reasons valid these days. But Emmy and her father live in "the hills"—never mind whether this be in New Jersey or in West Virginia. We should get to know people such as these, more than we do. Their traditions are also ours. . .

around an old fruit basket, filled to the brim with moldering fish.

Paw was always forgetting the chores, but he meant well. He had listened when she told him what they said in school about soil feeding. That's what the fish heads were for, but the garden wasn't big enough for a whole bushel of the smelly things.

Emmy had to quit school when Maw died. She was only nine years old when she started keeping house for Paw. But she took to housework like a bee to clover, and now that she was almost sixteen, she was hoping for a man of her own to do for. There was someone special she had in mind, too, a tall straw-haired boy named Raymond, who worked in the general store.

On Saturdays Paw drove her to town in the old flivver, to sell their eggs. Then he would take her to the general store for a package of chawing tobacco, and sometimes a length of pretty cotton for a new church meeting dress. Emmy was growing so fast she kept busting out of her clothes and near embarrassed him to death, Paw said.

A few big raindrops splashed against Emmy's cheek and as she hurried to fill her apron with plump red beets, she turned almost beet color, herself, remembering the way Raymond looked at her after church last Sunday.

"Mornin', Emmy," he had said.

"Mornin'," she replied. "I, um, noticed you wasn't here last week. Hope you warn't ailin'."

Raymond looked pleased.

"I warn't sick, I just went huntin! Don't have time to go week days."

He drew a little closer.

"Ain't that the calico you bought last Saturday?"

Emmy nodded.

"Looks a heap better with you inside it," he said. Then he jumped into the pickup truck and drove off.

Emmy had looked around to see if Paw was listening, but he stood at the other side of the church yard, confabbing with a group of his friends. On the way home, he told her what the menfolks had been talking about.

"Some of the boys heerd over the radio that a prisoner escaped from the State Farm over in the next county. So you keep them doors bolted when I ain't home, daughter. You hear?"

The memory of Paw's words made Emmy scurry back into the cabin and bolt

the door behind her. Then she emptied her apron into a pail and filled the pail with water from the kitchen pump.

She was busy lighting a fire in the coal stove when she heard a noise outside. For a moment her heart jumped with fear. Paw always called out to her when he came up the path. Then she remembered. Probably that old bear again, looking for something to eat. A couple of nights ago he had knocked over the wood pile. He might be after those fish heads. Emmy decided to load Paw's hunting rifle, just in case the bear got too friendly. Then she propped it in a corner to keep it handy.

She had just lit the kerosene lamp when the rain let loose in a torrent. It beat against the windows and pounded on the tarpaper roof, but the house was cozy and warm inside, with the lamp casting a yellow light over the room. Emmy began to hum as she set the table for supper. Suddenly, there was a loud thump, like the front door had blown open. She had forgotten to fasten the bolt! Emmy was going for the rifle in the corner, when a harsh voice behind her said, "Don't touch that shootin' arn!"

Before she could turn, her arms were pinned roughly behind her, and she was thrust into the kitchen chair. When he released her to grab the rifle, she saw the man's burly figure in heavy prison clothes, with a two-day growth of beard on his ugly face. He stood there, dripping wet, while his eyes darted around the small room.

"You're gonna feed me what you got cookin' there, little gal, and when I've et, you and me'll get better acquainted."

His dark eyes glittered as they traveled over Emmy's blossoming young figure, shivering with fright in her old work dress.

He waved the loaded rifle at her. "Git goin' now," he ordered.

Emmy moved quickly to the cookstove and began to cut strips of fat back into the sizzling skillet.

Where was Paw? What was keeping him so long? She considered her chances of heaving the heavy skillet at the convict's head, but a glance told her that he was watching every move she made.

"My Paw'll be home soon" she said, with more assurance than she felt, "and he better not ketch you here!"

"I ain't skeered of no old

man," the man growled. "Just git that supper on a plate and don't worry 'bout nothin' else!"

A heavy clap of thunder made Emmy look up. From where she stood, she thought there was a gleam, through the window, of headlights coming up the road. If someone was passing, she prayed they would stop. But maybe the lightning was playing tricks on her.

When the food was ready, she ladled it out and cautiously shoved it across the table to where the man sat. He held the rifle in the crook of his arm while he ate, and kept his beady eyes fastened on Emmy.

Watching him cram the food greedily into his mouth, Emmy's hopes sank. There was no sound of life from the outside. She would have to deal with the powerful, desperate man, herself. She backed slowly to the sink, not daring to turn her back to him. One trembling hand slid over the edge of the counter top and closed around the paring knife.

The man polished his plate with a piece of bread and then sat back with a snaggle-toothed grin.

"Mighty fine cookin'," he said. "Now come on over here, young 'un, so's we can git to know each other better. C'mon!"

As Emmy moved away from the counter, the man lifted the rifle.

"Whatcha got behint your back? Whatcha got there? Drop it!"

He brought the gun around until it touched Emmy's throat, and her little weapon clattered to the floor.

He sneered.

"Now, for bein' so smart, I'm gonna tie you up! Git into the front room there and lie down on the cot!"

He grabbed her clothesline from a peg on the kitchen wall, and bound her arms and waist to the cot. Then he locked the door and leaned the rifle against it.

"Don't need it now," he said, leering at her.

He reached over to stroke Emmy's silky hair. Suddenly he jumped.

"What was that?" He turned his head to the front door and listened.

Then Emmy heard it, too, the murmur of low male voices and the thump of heavy steps. Whipping out a kerchief, the outlaw stuffed it into Emmy's mouth.

"That path in back. It leads to the river road, don't it? Jest nod your head."

Emmy nodded, her eyes wide with fright.

As the voices and footsteps grew louder, the man grabbed the gun and dashed out the kitchen door into the darkness.

Emmy heard her Paw shouting at her and pounding on the front door, but she couldn't move or make a sound. Then someone raised the window from the outside and a pair of long legs swung over the sill. When she saw Raymond's startled face, she began to relax.

"Emmy, what happened to ya?"

Raymond quickly unbolted the door to let Paw in. Then he pulled the kerchief from her mouth and untied her. Emmy was so overcome with relief that she started to cry. Both of them were close to her then, patting her hands.

"Who did it, girl?" Paw demanded.

"It was the convict that escaped from the prison farm, Paw," she said, choking back the tears. "He ran down the path to the river road and he's got your rifle!"

"The path to the river road?" Paw and Raymond looked at each other and grinned.

"He won't git fur," Paw said.

"What do ya mean?" asked Emmy, astonished.

"Yore Paw come into the store fur a fishin' line," Raymong explained, still holding on to Emmy's hand, "and he told me 'bout the bear that's been comin' up to yore back porch at night. It was near closin', so I drove him to my place to git my trap, and showed him how to set it." Suddenly, the air was shattered by an agonizing scream.

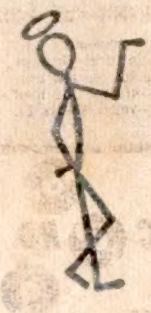
"Yup," Paw said, "we set it right out there on the path where I seen them bear tracks, and then we came back to stow the tools in Raymond's truck. That's how come we went round the front. A good thing, too, seein' as he had the rifle."

"Raymond," Paw added, "Ya better git the sheriff afore that varmint in the trap bleeds to death."

"Keer to come along?" Raymond asked, smiling at Emmy.

Emmy glanced shyly at her Paw.

"You young 'uns 'go ahead," he said. "I gotta clean these here fish."



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Forgotten road to success in writing

By J. D. Ratcliff

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